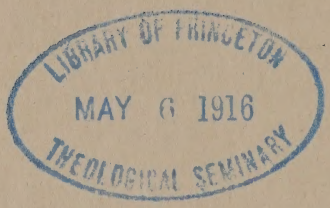
Francesco Petrarca



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PETRARCH.

See page ix.

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Petrarch

The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters

A Selection from his Correspondence with Boccaccio and other Friends, Designed to Illustrate the Beginnings of the Renaissance. Translated from the Original Latin, together with Historical Introductions and Notes

BY

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SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED

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TO

G. R. R.

AND

B. C. R.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

DURING the fifteen years which have elapsed since the appearance of the first edition of this volume a marked changed of attitude has taken place among scholars in regard to the "Renaissance" and the nature and importance of the revival of classical literature. This change is briefly explained in the opening pages of the introductory chapter (which have been entirely rewritten), and the reasons given for assigning to the "Renaissance" a less distinctive place in the history of culture than it formerly enjoyed. While this does not essentially affect the value of Petrarch's letters and the interest and importance of the personality which they reveal, it enables us to put him and his work in a more correct perspective.

There has, moreover, been added to Chapter VI (pp. 413 *sqq.*) a careful analysis of Petrarch's *Secret.* These confessions must be accorded a high place in the literature of self-revelation; they furnish the reader a more complete and vivid impression of Petrarch's intellectual life as well as of his strange and varied emotions than can be formed from read-

ing the correspondence alone. He not only understood his complicated self but possessed in an unprecedented degree the power of conciliating the interest of others in his own troubles and perplexities. In short, this new edition will serve at once to rectify certain general misapprehensions and at the same time to give a more adequate account of the truly extraordinary person with which it deals.

J. H. R.

Columbia University,
November, 1913.

PREFATORY NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE purpose of this volume is essentially historical. It is not a piece of literary criticism; it is only incidentally a biography. It has been prepared with the single but lively hope of making a little clearer the development of modern culture. It views Petrarch not as a poet, nor even, primarily, as a many-sided man of genius, but as the mirror of his age—a mirror in which are reflected all the momentous contrasts between waning Mediævalism and the dawning Renaissance.

Petrarch knew almost everyone worth knowing in those days; consequently few historical sources can rival his letters in value and interest; their character and significance are discussed at length in the introduction which follows.

We have ourselves come to love the eager, independent, clear-sighted, sensitive soul through whose eyes we have followed the initial spiritual struggle of modern times; we would that others might learn to love him too.

In the preparation of this volume the editors have naturally availed themselves of the

excellent edition of Petrarch's *Epistolæ de Rebus Familiaribus et Variæ*, by Giuseppe Fracassetti, 3 vols., 8°, Florence, 1859–63. For the *Epistolæ de Rebus Senilibus*, and the remaining Latin works, they have necessarily relied upon the lamentably incorrect edition of the *Opera* printed at Basle in 1581, for in spite of its imperfections it is the most complete collection of Petrarch's writings that we possess. The references in the foot-notes are, therefore, to the pages of Fracassetti's edition or of that of 1581, as the case may be. Much aid has been derived from Körting's standard work, *Petrarca's Leben und Werke;* from Fracassetti's elaborate notes to his Italian version of the letters; from Voigt's masterly analysis of Petrarch's character and career, at the opening of *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums;* and especially from M. Pierre de Nolhac's scholarly and fascinating study, *Pétrarque et l'Humanisme.*

Part third of the present volume, upon Petrarch's classical studies, is the work of Mr. Rolfe, and the whole book has had the benefit of his acute and painstaking revision.

J. H. R.

Birchwood, Jaffrey, N. H.,
September, 1898.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

I.—A Sketch of Vaucluse by Petrarch's Hand . . . . . *Cover*

II.—Portrait of Petrarch . . *Frontispiece*

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Through the kindness of M. de Nolhac, and with the generous permission of the École des hautes Études at Paris, the editors have been enabled to reproduce three plates of unusual historical interest.

I.—The Sketch of Vaucluse with the inscription, *Transalpina solitudo mea jocundissima*—my delightsome Transalpine retreat—which appears on the front cover of this volume, was discovered by M. de Nolhac in Petrarch's own copy of Pliny's *Natural History*. A reference in the book to the Fountain of the Sorgue suggested to its owner the idea of recalling by a few strokes of the quill his memories of a spot where he had spent so many years. This sketch, his only essay at pictorial reproduction which has come down to us, is an interesting illustration of the versatility of self-expression which distinguished him from his predecessors and contemporaries.

II.—The Portrait, which forms the frontispiece, is taken from a manuscript in the National Library at Paris, and its history has been carefully traced by M. de Nolhac (*op. cit.*, pp. 376 *sqq.*). It adorns the first page of a copy of Petrarch's own work, *The Lives of Illustrious Men*, which was transcribed with unusual care for his last

princely patron, the ruler of Padua, by one of the poet's most intimate and trusted friends, Lombardo della Seta. A note at the end of the work states that Lombardo completed his task January 25, 1379. We may, therefore, assume that this portrait was executed *not later* than four and a half years after Petrarch's death, in the city where he spent much of his time during the closing period of his life, and by an artist selected by the poet's devoted friends. It is maintained by some modern historians of art that there was, in those days, no real feeling for portraiture; without, however, venturing into the domain of art criticism, we may, at least, claim for this sketch almost unimpeachable historical authenticity.

III.—THE FACSIMILE of a page from one of Petrarch's own volumes will give some idea, to those unfamiliar with manuscripts, of the appearance of a book in the fourteenth century; it shows us, too, the untiring energy of the first modern scholar in emending and elucidating the scattered and neglected fragments of ancient literature, for which he made such diligent search.

INTRODUCTORY

La formule qui définit le mieux Pétrarque est celle qui le désigne comme "le premier homme moderne." . . . Par la direction de sa pensée, il échappe presque entièrement à l'influence de son siècle et de son milieu, ce qui est sans doute la marque la moins contestable du génie."—PIERRE DE NOLHAC.

HISTORY is the memory of mankind; it far outruns the narrow range of our own personal recollections and enables us to participate consciously in a process of change so impressive in its vast length and complexity as to reduce the experiences of our own generation to a mere incident. It makes it possible for us to see not only how to-day is growing out of yesterday, and this year out of last, but how the nineteenth century prepared the way for the twentieth, the eighteen for the nineteenth, and so on, back and back to the very beginnings of man's lineage. No one of us has precisely the same experiences two days in succession, and yet amid the most considerable vicissitudes of life we always carry over from day to day and year to year a great part of our habits and convictions,—which constitute what others call our character. The life of a people, although much more stable than that of most of its members, is always slowly and irrevocably altering; it is in the main a perpetuation of the

old but always possesses some element of the new, since the individuals who compose a nation, as well as the conditions under which they live, are always changing.

The historian should reckon with both the old and the new in tracing man's past; he must show not only how things have changed but how they have remained the same. The mass of hoary tradition and ancient custom which enters so generously into every stage of civilisation, no matter how progressive, often, however, escapes his observation. Successful historians are men of letters who have something of the poet, the dramatist or the story-teller in them, and in order to construct a narrative which has any chance of appealing to their readers they are forced, following the example of the playwright, to divide the past into periods, like the scenes in a play, and assign to each a dominant motive. In doing this they are tempted greatly to exaggerate the exceptional and novel. Moreover, since the historian can include in his story but a very small part of the multitudinous experiences of mankind during the period with which he is dealing, he inevitably selects what will fit into a coherent narrative and neglects all the rest; he must introduce order where there is essen-

tial confusion, lucidity where there is obscurity, and discover simplicity where their is inextricable complexity.

As a result of this highly artificial nature of the historian's work—of which he himself is usually unconscious—historical legends arise, which by reason of their dramatic character and their plausible simplicity are eagerly and widely accepted, and only reluctantly abandoned when some of the vast number of facts which have been neglected in their formation are given an opportunity to assert themselves. The pretty myth of the common origin and gradual dispersion of all those peoples whose language belongs to the Indo-European group has been dissipated by recollecting that a common language does not necessarily imply a common racial origin. The legend that Luther first translated the Bible into German vanishes before a list of the numerous editions of German Bibles printed during the fifty years previous to his undertaking. The publication of Napoleon's letters add too many facts to permit one longer to accept what Thiers and John S. C. Abbott say of him. A similar fate awaits *the Renaissance;* that, too, has assumed the form of a myth, which is threatened by a consideration of certain obvious facts which its

authors innocently, but none the less fatally, overlooked.

As this word is used in histories of literature, art, and philosophy, it implies a freeing of man's mind from the shackles of the Middle Ages; he discovers himself and the world in all its beauty and interest; he shakes off religious dependence and becomes self-reliant; he casts aside the cowl and goes forth joyfully into the sunlight. This awakening has been attributed to a revived interest in the neglected works of the classical authors. They were potent, it has been assumed, to bring new life into a paralysed world, so soon as they become the object of passionate study and emulation. It was they, it has been claimed, that dispelled the gloomy superstition of the Dark Ages and aroused a buoyant spirit of Hellenism which enabled men to soar above the fruitless subtleties of Scholastic Theology.

This conception of the Renaissance is much more recent in origin than is usually supposed; it is scarcely more than fifty years old, and finds its first clear presentation in the well-known *Civilisation of the Renaissance*, which the Basel professor, Jacob Burckhardt, published in 1860. Fifteen years later John Addington Symonds began to issue his stately series of

volumes on *The Renaissance in Italy.* The charm of his style served to popularise the conception of a distinctive period during which Europe awoke from its winter sleep and developed those traits of character which we deem essentially modern. For a generation or more the Renaissance has been the theme of innumerable popular books and lectures and has constituted a recognised "epoch" in manuals of historical instruction.

That it is a convenient term no one will deny! The civilisation of the Italian city states in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, from Dante to Machiavelli, from Giotto to Raphael, presents so much of rich delight that we ought to have a suitable name for it all. In this sense the expression, Renaissance, will probably continue to be used; but it is safe to predict that as we gain fuller insight into the conditions which preceded and followed this period it will be ranked much lower than hitherto as a time of decisive progress in human knowledge and ideals. Neither Burckhardt nor Symonds were cognisant of the extraordinary achievements of what they called vaguely the Middle Ages. And both of them were so classical-minded as to have but an inadequate appreciation of how slight

were the intellectual changes of the Renaissance compared with those that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the results of which make the world in which we live what it is.

It is clear enough to historical students of to-day that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries offer the spectacle of a far more unmistakable awakening than does the so-called Renaissance. These centuries witnessed the development of the towns, the revival of the Roman Law, the founding of the universities, in which the encyclopædic works of the most learned, penetrating, and exacting of all ancient thinkers—Aristotle—were made the basis of a liberal education; and they beheld the literary birth of those vernacular languages which were one day to displace the speech of the Romans. These centuries devised, moreover, a new, varied, and lovely style of architecture, sculpture, and ornament, which still fills us with wonder and delight; they carried the knowledge of natural things and the practical arts beyond the point reached by Greeks or Romans; they sketched out the great career of experimental and applied science, which was hidden from the ancients and which is one of the main revolutionising forces of our day.

When we consider these and other achievements which preceded the Renaissance we are forced to ask what did it contribute that was equally important and distinctive? This question is a difficult one. Neither Burckhardt nor Symonds were in a position even to ask it, and only recently are students in this field setting themselves to re-examine more carefully and fully the facts, and place the achievements of the period in proper relation to what went before and what came after.[1]

One thing at least is clear. The knowledge of the Greek language had died out in western Europe with the disruption of the Roman Empire, and except in so far as Greek thought and taste had become embodied in Latin, it was lost for several hundreds of years. In the thirteenth century Aristotle's works were put into Latin, and so deeply did they impress their readers that they were assigned a supreme place, alongside the Bible and the Church and Roman Law. Two centuries later a great part of the Greek classics, Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, and above all Plato, were brought from Constantinople,

[1] The writer has ventured to suggest that the thought of the Renaissance is much more akin to that of the Middle Ages than with that of to-day. See *The New History*, pp. 101 *sqq*.

translated into Latin and made available for such scholars as cared to read them. This was the great literary work of the fifteenth century. Meanwhile every vestige of Latin literature was being hunted out, copied, and edited. There was not a great deal to be found that had not been known and read more or less all along, but the sense of its preciousness increased and a conviction developed that it was far better than anything that had been produced since the German Barbarians broke up the Roman Empire. The scholars who carried on this work had much to say of *humanitas*, by which they meant the culture to which man alone, of all creatures, is able to aspire. Cicero uses the word in this sense, and they found it defined for them by Aulus Gellius, a compiler who lived under Marcus Aurelius. Culture to them was in the main what it has been to the classical-minded ever since—namely, familiar intercourse with the best authors of Greece and Rome.

The Humanists did not, however, at once cast off the mediæval modes of thought. They ranged on their library shelves side by side with the pagan classics, the works of the Greek and Latin Christian fathers; they fell under the spell of Neoplatonism and deemed Plotinus and Porphyry legitimate interpreters of Plato. They

were not even proof against the crude superstitions and futilities of the Jewish Cabbala.

The rôle of classical literature in the development of thought and taste is momentous, but it has served to hamper as well as to forward the progress of knowledge and the increase of insight. The classics have to-day worn out their welcome in many quarters. The more bigoted among the classicists of our own time have little of the truly Hellenic about them. Greece in its finest period owed its greatness partly to its frank use of its own vernacular language, partly to its exceptional freedom from tradition and routine. The classicist, on the contrary, would have us base our education upon dead languages and adhere piously to tradition and routine. The Greek writers of the fifth century before Christ were free and progressive; their modern retainers are too often ultra-conservative and indifferent to the glowing opportunities of their own time.

But their position in any case is very different from that of the Humanists of the fifteenth century. To-day we can acquaint ourselves with the best that has been said and thought without going back to the masterpieces of antiquity. Each European people has developed its own national literature and given birth to

geniuses able to assimilate, elaborate, and augment the older heritage in modern speech and modern literary forms. So the importance of the revival of classical scholarship five hundred years ago is not to be judged by the position that Greek and Roman books occupy in our intellectual life to-day. However conscious one may be of the limitations of classical thought and the obstacles which its unconditional admirers have opposed to natural and salutary intellectual readjustments, no one will have any inclination to underrate its vast significance in the development of modern culture.

Francesco Petrarch is generally accorded the distinction of being the first great leader in the revival of classical literature. He did not live to see the incoming of the Greek books, but he made a vain effort to learn the language and fully realised its importance. He was, moreover, untiring in promoting the study of Roman literature and writes to his dearest friend Boccaccio: "I certainly will not reject the praise which you bestow upon me for having stimulated in many instances, not only in Italy but perchance beyond its confines, the pursuit of studies such as ours, which have suffered neglect for so many centuries. I am indeed one of the

oldest among us who are engaged in the cultivation of these subjects."[1]

But Petrarch's claim upon our attention as the father of Humanism is only one—and that perhaps a minor one—among many. In his own humanity lies perhaps his chief charm: A poor mortal like ourselves, he tells us so persuasively and fully of his own feelings, his self contradictions and spiritual conflicts, that, as we read his letters and "Confessions," we greet him across the gulf of centuries and recognise in him a man of like passions with ourselves. We can become more intimately acquainted with him than with any one in the whole history of mankind before his time, not excepting Cicero and Augustine. Those who know Petrarch, know him ordinarily only through his Italian verses, now somewhat out of style. But Petrarch the reformer, the first modern scholar, the implacable enemy of ignorance and superstition; Petrarch the counsellor of princes, the leader of men, and the idol of his time, is to be sought in his letters, of which some of the more striking are made available in this volume.

His incomparable sonnets seemed to their author in his later years little more than a

[1] *Ep. de Rebus Sen.*, xvi., 2.

youthful diversion. They earned for him among the illiterate multitude a reputation which he claimed to despise; they could never constitute the foundation for the scholar's fame to which he aspired. Had he foreseen that posterity would brush aside the great works in Latin which, cost him years of toil, and keep only his "popular trifles in the mother tongue" (*nugellas meas vulgares*), his chronic melancholy might have deepened into dark despair. Near the close of his life, in preparing a copy of his Italian verses for a friend, he says: "I must confess that I look with aversion upon the silly boyish things I at one time produced in the vernacular (*vulgari juveniles ineptias*). Of these I could wish everyone ignorant, myself included. Although their style may testify to a certain ability considering the period at which I composed them; their subject matter ill comports with the gravity of age. But what am I to do? They are in the hands of the public and are read more willingly than the serious works which with more highly developed faculties I have written since."[1]

A German scholar (Voigt) has gone so far as to declare that Petrarch would be no less bright a star in the history of the human mind, had he

[1] *Sen.*, xiii., 10; *Opera* (1581), p. 923.

never written a verse of Italian. This very obvious exaggeration is perhaps both natural and salutary. The Latin works, especially the letters, are so fascinating and exhibit such new and important phases of his character and ideals, that those who have enthusiastically busied themselves with them have gradually come to accept the poet's repeated assertion that his Italian works were mere youthful trifles, of little interest as compared with his great Latin epic or his various treatises.[1] Yet the world has decided otherwise, and decided rightly. It has allowed over three hundred years to pass without demanding a new edition of those Latin works, by which the author sought to gain everlasting renown, while, on the other hand, hundreds of editions of the despised Canzoniere have been published, not only in the original but in many translations. For the poet finds his fullest expression in his greatest literary work, the Italian lyrics. No one really familiar with the letters will fail to recognise in them the author of the sonnets. We find there the same strength and weakness, the same genuine feeling, often disguised by mannerisms and

[1] For Petrarch's attitude toward the Italian language the reader is referred to Part II., below.

traditional conceits, the same aspirations and conflicts, the same subjectivity and self-analysis. We have to do with a single great spirit revealing itself with a diversity and mobility of literary form known only to genius. Opening the *Canzoniere*, we find in the following lines sentiments which might have been despatched in an elegant epistle to his friend Nelli, or to "Lælius," or recorded in his Confessions.

> Ma ben veggi' or sì come al popol tutto
> Favola fui gran tempo: onde sovente
> Di me medesmo meco mi vergogno:
> E del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,
> E 'l pentirsi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente
> Che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.[1]

But even if it be admitted that the lyrics form Petrarch's greatest claim to renown, and that the letters often only reflect, as might be anticipated, sentiments familiar to the thoughtful reader of the Italian verses, yet the poems alone can never tell the whole story of their author's importance and influence. Literary ideals which have no place in the sonnets are to be found in the letters; in them we may study the reviver of a forgotten culture, and the prophet of an era of intellectual advance the direct results of which we still enjoy.

[1] From the first sonnet, beginning, Voi ch'ascoltate.

The Middle Ages furnish us no earlier example of the psychological analysis which we discover in both the verse and prose of Petrarch. His writings are the first to reveal completely a human soul, with its struggles, its sufferings, and its contradictions. "Petrarch was a master in one respect at least, he understood how to picture himself; through him the inner world first receives recognition; he first notes, observes, analyses, and sets forth its phenomena."[1] The all-pervading self-consciousness that meets us in the letters is sure to produce a painful impression as we first open them. It may, for a time, indeed, seem little better than common priggishness. But behind a thin veil of vanity and morbid sensitiveness we straightway discover a great soul grappling with the mystery of life. Baffled by the contradictions that it feels within itself, it gropes tremblingly towards a new ideal of earthly existence.

Petrarch was not content to live unquestioningly, adjusting his conduct to the conventional standard. He was constantly preoccupied with his own aims and motives. Nor was the problem that he confronted a simple one, for the old and the new were contending for supremacy

[1] Gaspary, *Geschichte der italienischen Literatur*, 1885, i., 480.

within his breast. The mediæval conception of our mortal life was that of a brief period of probation, during which each played his obscure rôle in the particular group, guild, or corporation to which Providence had assigned him, bearing his burdens patiently in the beatific vision of a speedy reward in another and better world. Petrarch formally assented to this view but never accepted it. The preciousness of life's opportunity was ever before him. Life was certainly a preparation for heaven, but, he asked himself, was it not something more? Might there not be worthy secular aims? Might not one raise himself above those about him and earn the approval of generations to come, as the great writers of antiquity had done? His longing to obtain an earthly reputation, and the temptation consciously to direct his energies toward achieving posthumous fame, seemed to him now a noble instinct, and again, when tradition weighed heavily upon him, a godless infatuation. In order to put the matter before himself in all its aspects he prepared an imaginary dialogue, after the model offered by Boëthius and Cicero, between himself and Saint Augustine. This little book he called his *Secret*, as he did not desire to have it enumerated among the works he had

written for fame's sake : and here he recorded his spiritual conflicts for his own personal good.[1] Of the contents of this extraordinary confession something will be said later. Its very existence is an historic fact of the utmost significance.[2]

Petrarch aspired to be both a poet and a scholar, and it is not easy to determine definitely whether in his later years he looked upon his great Latin epic or upon his historical works as his best title to fame. He often refers to the high mission of the poet, and in the address that he delivered at Rome, when he received the laurel crown, he took for his subject the nature of poetry. For him poetry embraced only Latin verse in its classical form. The popular, rhyming cadences of the Middle Ages, in which the rhythmic accent followed not quantity but the prose accent,[3] doubtless

[1] *Cf.* Preface to *Dialogus de Contemptu Mundi*, as the work is called in the Basle editions. Many MSS. entitle the work more appropriately *De Secreto Conflictu Curarum Suarum*. *Cf.* Voigt, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[2] See below, pp. 93 *sqq.* and 404 *sqq.*

[3] For example the familiar,

Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvet sæclum in favilla.,

or Abelard's lines :

In hac urbe lux solemnis,
Ver æternum, pax perennis.
In hac odor implens cœlos,
In hac semper festum melos.

seemed to him no more deserving of the name of poetry than Dante's *Commedia* or his own Italian sonnets. We shall have occasion later to describe his peculiar conception of allegory.[1]

As a scholar Petrarch had no definite bent. "Among the many subjects which have interested me," he says, "I have dwelt especially upon antiquity, for our own age has always repelled me, so that, had it not been for the love of those dear to me, I should have preferred to have been born in any other period than our own. In order to forget my own time I have constantly striven to place myself in spirit in other ages, and consequently I have delighted in history."[2] We shall not then be going far astray if we style Petrarch a classical philologist, using the term in a broad sense, and always remembering that an enlightened and enthusiastic classical philologist was just what the world much needed in the fourteenth century.

Although the letters are by far the most interesting of Petrarch's Latin productions, the reader may be curious to know something of the character and extent of the other long-forgotten books which the author trusted would earn him eternal fame. No complete

[1] See below, p. 233 *sqq*.
[2] *Letter to Posterity*.

edition of his works has ever been published,[1] but were they brought together, they would fill some seventeen volumes of the size of the present one, and we may imagine that the publishers would issue them somewhat as follows:

Vols. I–VIII, *The Letters.*

IX–X, *Phisicke against Fortune, as well Prosperous as Adverse*[2] (De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ).

XI, *Historical Anecdotes* (Rerum Memorandum Libri IV).

XII, *Lives of Famous Men.*

XIII, *The Life of Julius Cæsar.*[3]

XIV, *The Life of Solitude* and *On Monastic Leisure.*

XV, Miscellany, including the Confessions (De Contemptu Mundi seu Suum Secretum), Invectives, Addresses, and Minor Essays.

XVI, Latin Verse, comprising the *Africa*, the *Eclogues*, and sixty-seven *Metrical Epistles.*

XVII, The Italian Verse, comprising the *Sonnets*, *Canzone*, and Occasional Poems.

Of the Latin works only one can be said to have enjoyed any considerable popularity.

[1] The wretchedly printed editions published at Basle in 1554 and 1581 are the most complete, but they omit the work on *Famous Men* and nearly half of the letters.

[2] As first (and last) Englished by Thomas Twyne, London, 1579.

[3] This is a part of the *Lives of Famous Men*, but is nearly as long as all the others together.

Of the *Antidotes for Good and Evil Fortune* there were over twenty Latin editions issued from 1471 to 1756.[1] And besides the Latin original, translations exist in English, Bohemian, French, Spanish, Italian, and several in German. Yet only one or two new editions have been demanded during the past two hundred and fifty years. The first part of the work is destined to establish the vanity of all earthly subjects of congratulation, from the possession of a chaste daughter to the proprietorship of a flourishing hennery. In the second part comfort is administered to those who have lost a wife or child, or are suffering from toothache, a ruined reputation, the fear of lingering death, or are painfully conscious that they are growing too fat. What seems to us mere cant and cynical commonplace may well have gratified a generation that delighted in the frescos of the cemetery at Pisa, but the popularity of the book naturally waned just as Dances of Death lost their charm. Yet the essays are not entirely without interest,[2] and their variety and paradoxicalness, if nothing else, may still hold the attention.

[1] *Cf.* Ferrazzi, "Bibliografia Petrarchesca," in vol. v. of his *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Bassano, 1877.

[2] *E. g.*, Book i., chap. xliii.: on the possession of a library.

The two works upon which Petrarch probably based his literary reputation were the long Latin epic, the *Africa*, and his *Lives of Famous Men.* These are often referred to in his correspondence, especially the *Africa.* This was, however, never finished, and in his later years came to be a subject which the author could not hear mentioned without a sense of irritation. The poem was printed half a dozen times in the sixteenth century.[1] The biographical work fared much worse, and was, with the exception of the *Life of Cæsar*, not printed until our own day.[2]

Among the lesser works, the Confessions and an essay on *The Life of Solitude* were each printed eight or nine times before the year 1700. The letters also found readers. We have, however, but to glance at the list of editions of the *Canzoniere* to see how "these trivial verses, filled with the false and offensive praise of women," rather than his Latin epic and scholarly compilations, have served to keep his memory green. Thirty-four edi-

[1] Conradini has edited the work in *Padova a Petrarca*, 1874, and there are now two Italian versions and one in French.

[2] Edited by A. Razzolini, Bologna, 1874–9, in *Collezione di Opere Inedite o Rare.* Vols. 34–36. The *Life of Cæsar* was carefully edited by Schneider (Leipzig, 1827), with a discussion of Petrarch's divergences from classical Latin.

tions of the Italian verses were printed before 1500, and one hundred and sixty-seven in the sixteenth century. Since 1600 some two hundred more have appeared.[1]

It is not, however, in his formal treatises that the source of Petrarch's influence is to be found. They may aid us better to understand their author, but they can never explain the charm which he exercised over his contemporaries. He was not only an indefatigable scholar himself, but he possessed the power of stimulating, by his example, the scholarly ambition of those with whom he came in contact. He rendered the study of the Latin classics popular among cultivated persons, and by his own untiring efforts to discover the lost or forgotten works of the great writers of antiquity he roused a new and general enthusiasm for the formation of libraries and the critical determination of the proper readings in the newly found manuscripts.

It is hard for us to imagine the obstacles which confronted the scholars of the early Renaissance. They possessed no critical editions of the classics in which the text had been established by a comparison of all the

[1] For this whole subject see Ferrazzi, *op. cit.*, especially p. 760. An excellent analysis of the Latin works may be found in Körting, *Petrarca's Leben u. Werke*, Leipzig, 1878, pp. 542 *sqq.*

available codices. They considered themselves fortunate to discover a single copy of even well-known authors. And so corrupt was the text, Petrarch declares, by reason of careless transcriptions, that should Cicero or Livy return and stumblingly read his own writings once more, he would promptly declare them the work of another, perhaps of a barbarian.[1]

While copies of the *Æneid*, of Horace's *Satires*, and of certain of Cicero's *Orations*, of Ovid, Seneca, and a few other authors, were apparently by no means uncommon during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it seemed to Petrarch, who had learned through the references of Cicero, Quintilian, Saint Augustine, and others, something of the original extent of Latin literature, that treasures of inestimable value had been lost by the shameful indifference of the Middle Ages. "Each famous author of antiquity whom I recall," he indignantly exclaims, "places a new offence and another cause of dishonour to the charge of later generations, who, not satisfied with their own disgraceful barrenness, permitted the fruit of other minds and the writings that their ancestors had produced by toil and application, to perish through insufferable neglect. Although they

[1] *De Rem. Utriusq. Fortunæ*, i., 43; *Opera* (1581), p. 43.

had nothing of their own to hand down to those who were to come after, they robbed posterity of its ancestral heritage."[1] The collection of a library was, then, the first duty of one whose mission it was to re-establish the world in its literary patrimony.

A man's books are not a bad measure of the man himself, provided he be what Lowell calls a book-man, and his collections be really a genuine expression of his preferences and not those of his grandfather or his bookseller. If this is true to-day, with the all-pervading spirit of commercial enterprise which constantly imposes upon our tastes, how much more true must it have been when Petrarch, with all his self-sacrificing enthusiasm and industry, brought together during a long life only two hundred volumes.[2] Books in those days were of course laboriously produced by hand. There was no device to secure uniformity in the copies of a work as they were slowly written off by the same or different persons. Each scribe inevitably made new mistakes which could be safely corrected only by a comparison with the author's manuscript. The average copyist was ap-

[1] *Rerum Mem.*, i., 2, as corrected by M. de Nolhac: *Pétrarque et l'Humanisme*, p. 268.

[2] *Cf.* de Nolhac, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

parently hardly more careful than the type-setter of to-day. A book as it came from his hands was little better than uncorrected galley proof.

In one case, Petrarch tried for years to get one of his shorter works, *The Life of Solitude*, satisfactorily transcribed, so that he could send a copy of it to the friend to whom he had dedicated it. He writes:

"I have tried ten times and more to have it copied in such a way that, even if the style should not please either the ears or the mind, the eyes might yet be gratified by the form of the letters. But the faithfulness and industry of the copyists, of which I am constantly complaining and with which you are familiar, have, in spite of all my earnest efforts, frustrated my wishes. These fellows are verily the plague of noble minds. What I have just said must seem incredible. A work written in a few months cannot be copied in so many years! The trouble and discouragement involved in the case of more important books is obvious. At last, after all these fruitless trials, on leaving home, I put the manuscript into the hands of a certain priest to copy. Whether he will, as a priest, perform his duty conscientiously, or, as a copyist, be ready to deceive, I

cannot yet say. I learn from the letters of friends that the work is done. Of its quality, knowing the habits of this tribe of copyists, I shall continue to harbour doubts until I actually see it. Such is the ignorance, laziness, or arrogance of these fellows, that, strange as it may seem, they do not reproduce what you give them, but write out something quite different." [1]

Each copy of a work had, therefore, before the invention of printing, its own peculiar virtues and vices. A correct and clearly written codex possessed charms which no modern "numbered" edition on wide-margined paper can equal. We have many indications of the affection which Petrarch felt for his books and which he instilled into others. Even his rustic old servant at Vaucluse learned to distinguish the various volumes, great and small. The old fellow would glow with satisfaction, his master tells us, when a book was put into his hands to be replaced upon the shelves; pressing it to his bosom, he would softly murmur the name of the author.[2] Petrarch's

[1] *Sen.*, v., 1; *Opera* (1581), p. 792. Compare, on the general subject, G. H. Putnam's *Books and their Makers in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1896.

[2] *Epistolæ de Rebus Familiaribus*, xvi., 1 (Fracassetti's edition, vol. ii., p. 363).

interest was, however, no selfish one ; he fondly hoped that his collection would become the nucleus of a great public library, such as we find a century or two after his time. When he could no longer foster interest in his favourite studies by his own potent presence and by his letters to his friends and fellow-scholars, his books, with their careful annotations and textual corrections, would form a permanent incentive to progress.

He chose Venice as the most appropriate place to establish his library. The letter in which he offers to leave his books to that city gives us a clear notion of his purpose. Laying aside all regard for classical models, he addressed the Venetian Government in the current Latin of the chancery:

" Francesco Petrarca desires, if it shall please Christ and St. Mark, to bequeath to that blessed Evangelist the books he now possesses or may acquire in the future, on condition that the books shall not be sold or in any way scattered, but shall be kept in perpetuity in some appointed place, safe from fire and rain, in honour of the said saint and as a memorial of the giver, as well as for the encouragement and convenience of the scholars and gentlemen of the said city who may delight in such things.

He does not wish this because his books are very numerous or very valuable, but is impelled by the hope that hereafter that glorious city may, from time to time, add other works at the public expense, and that private individuals, nobles, or other citizens who love their country, or perhaps even strangers, may follow his example and leave a part of their books, by their last will, to the said church. Thus it may easily fall out that the collection shall one day become a great and famous library, equal to those of the ancients. The glory which this would shed upon this State can be understood by learned and ignorant alike. Should this be brought about, with the aid of God and of the famous patron of your city, the said Francesco would be greatly rejoiced, and glorify God that he had been permitted to be, in a way, the source of this great benefit. He may write at greater length if the affair proceeds. That it may be quite clear that he does not mean to confine himself in so important a matter to mere words, he desires to accomplish what he promises, etc.

"In the meantime he would like for himself and the said books a house, not large, but respectable [*honestam*], in order that none of the accidents to which mortals are subject shall in-

terfere with the realisation of his plan. He would gladly reside in the city if he can conveniently do so, but of this he cannot be sure, owing to numerous difficulties. Still he hopes that he may do so." [1]

September 4, 1362, the grand council determined to accept the offer of Petrarch, "whose glory," the document recites, "was such throughout the whole world that no one, in the memory of man, could be compared with him in all Christendom, as a moral philosopher and a poet." The expense for a suitable dwelling was to be met from the public treasury, and the officials of St. Mark's were ready to provide a proper place for the books.

Petrarch lived for several years, as we shall see, in the house furnished by the Venetian Government, and it was, until recently, believed that his books were sent to the city, and, to the disgrace of the Republic, allowed to perish from negligence. Tommasini, the author of a once esteemed life of Petrarch, reports the discovery in 1634, in a room of St. Mark's, of certain stray volumes nearly destroyed by moisture and neglect,[2] which he assumed to be the re-

[1] The Latin original, transcribed from the archives of Venice, is to be found in de Nolhac, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

[2] *Petrarcha Redivivus*, 2d ed. (Padua, 1650), p. 72.

mains of Petrarch's original collection. This has recently been shown to be a mistake, for the books in question never belonged to Petrarch, many indeed dating from the next century. There is, in fact, no reason to suppose that his library ever reached Venice after his death.

M. Pierre de Nolhac has succeeded, by the most minute and painstaking study of Petrarch's handwriting and habits of annotation, in partially reconstructing a catalogue of his books. The fate of the poet's collection was a matter of vital interest to the literary men of his time. Immediately after his death, Boccaccio wrote to ask what had been done with the *bibliotheca pretiosissima*. Some, he said, reported one thing and some another. But the books evidently found their way to Padua, for it was there that Coluccio Salutati and others sent for copies, not only of Petrarch's own works, but of rare classics which he possessed, such as Propertius and the less known orations of Cicero. Petrarch's last tyrant-patron, Francesco di Carrara, Lord of Padua, had for several years been upon bad terms with Venice, and it is easy to understand why the famous library, once in his possession, was never delivered to St. Mark's, as its owner had intended.

The prince appears to have sold many of the volumes, although he retained a choice selection for himself. A renewal of the wars with his neighbours brought upon him, however, a final calamity, and he was forced to cede all of his possessions, in 1388, to Gian Galeazzo Visconti. The latter carried off the precious books to Pavia, where he added them to his own important collection. One volume has been discovered by M. de Nolhac, which bears the half-obliterated name of Francesco di Carrara. But Pavia was in turn robbed of its treasures, for in 1499 the French seized them and transported them to Blois, whence they have found their way to Paris. Some twenty-six volumes in the National Library have been satisfactorily proven actually to have belonged to Petrarch, while Rome can boast of but six, and Florence, Venice, Padua, and Milan of one each. The rest may either have been destroyed, or be wanting in those characteristic traits by which they could be identified.

Petrarch's habit of annotating the books in which he was most interested[1] gives the volumes which have come down to us a certain autobiographical value, and M. de Nolhac's study of these extempore and informal impressions will

[1] *Cf. Fam.*, xxiv., 1 (vol. iii., p. 250).

fascinate every admirer of the *premier humaniste*. We cannot, of course, infer from the fragments of the library which can now be identified what the original collection included, but a careful study of his works and of the extant marginal glosses has led M. de Nolhac to the following conclusions. The library doubtless contained almost all the great Latin poets except Lucretius. Petrarch probably knew Tibullus only from an anthology. There were serious gaps in his Latin prose, but he had an especially good collection of the Latin historians. Tacitus, although known to Boccaccio, was quite missing, and he had only the more important portions of Quintilian's *Institutes*, which he much admired. Seneca was nearly complete, and he had most of the best-known works of Cicero, although the letters *Ad Familiares* and a number of the *Orations* were wanting. Of the early Christian Fathers, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were prominent, but this section of his library contained relatively few authors, while the mediæval writers were very scarce indeed. The *Letters* of Abelard, some works of Hugh de Saint Victor, Dante's *Commedia*, and the *Decameron* of Boccaccio were, we know, included. Petrarch could not read Greek, but he possessed Latin versions of the

Timæus of Plato, the *Ethics* and *Politics*, at least, of Aristotle, Josephus's *Histories*, and the translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that he and Boccaccio had had made. The want of Greek literature was the greatest weakness in his education; for, having no means of comparison, he was led to estimate falsely the value of the Latin classics.

In considering the powers of criticism which Petrarch exhibits in his discussion of the Latin language and literature, the study of which was his main occupation during a long life, we must not unconsciously allow ourselves to judge him by the scientific standard of to-day. Before we can give full credit to his genius we must recollect the incredible ignorance of his time. To give but one instance—an eminent professor in the University of Bologna, in a letter to Petrarch, gravely ranked Cicero among the poets, and assumed that Ennius and Statius were contemporaries.[1] A free fancy was the only prerequisite for establishing derivations. We find no less a student than Dante explicitly rejecting a correct etymology in order to substitute for it one which suited him better,[2] when

[1] *Fam.*, iv., 15.

[2] *Il Convito*, iv., 16. For the conceptions of grammar in the thirteenth century see Turot's remarkable study in the *Notices et Extraits des MSS.*, vol. 22.

he claims that *nobile* is derived from *non vile* instead of from *nosco.*

In order to understand the deep significance of Petrarch's scholarship, one must turn to a book like the *Etymologies* of the saintly Isidore of Seville, whose work was a standard treatise in the Middle Ages. To choose an example or two at random, we find that the lamb (Latin, *agnus*) owes its name to the fact that "it recognises [*agnoscit*] its mother at a greater distance than other animals, so that in even a very large herd it immediately bleats response to its parent's voice." *Equi* (horses) are so called because they were equal (*æquabantur*) when hitched to a chariot.[1] It may well be that Petrarch knew but little more about the science of language in the modern sense of the word than Isidore or the author of the *Græcismus*, another famous textbook of the period, but his spirit is the spirit of a scholar. Speculations of the kind above noted seemed to him fatuous and puerile, although he might have been entirely at a loss to suggest any more scientific derivations to replace the currently accepted ones. He distinguished instinctively between fact and fancy, and the reader will discover in his letters much

[1] Migne, *Patrologia Lat.*, vol. 82, pp. 408, 426.

sound criticism and an innate sense of fitness and proportion quite alien to the Middle Ages.

In no respect, indeed, is his greatness more apparent than in his general rejection of the educational ideals of his times. He was as little in sympathy with the intellectual predilections of the period as was Voltaire with the contentions of Jansenist and Jesuit. He disliked dialectics, the most esteemed branch of study in the mediæval schools; he utterly disregarded Scotus and Aquinas, and cared not for nominalism or realism, preferring to derive his religious doctrines from the Scriptures and the half-forgotten church Fathers, his partiality for whom, especially for Augustine and Ambrose, is evident from his numerous references to their works. His neglect of the Schoolmen is equally patent. Lastly, he dared to assert that Aristotle, although a distinguished scholar, was not superior to many of the ancients, and was inferior at least to Plato. He ventured to advance the opinion that not only was Aristotle's style bad, but his views upon many subjects were quite worthless.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the powerful fascination which Aristotle exercised over the mediæval mind. Only the Scriptures and the stately compilations of the civil and canon

law were classed with his works. His knowledge seemed all-embracing, and his dicta were accepted as unquestionable. He was "the Philosopher" (*philosophus*), "the master," as Dante calls him, "of them that know." Nor is his supremacy hard to understand. When his works reached Western Europe, at the end of the twelfth and the opening of the thirteenth century, partly through the Arabs of Spain and partly from Constantinople, men were filled with an eager, undiscriminating desire for knowledge. His treatises afforded both an acceptable method and the necessary data for interminable dialectical activity. His *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *Ethics*, and the rest, supplied abundant material upon which his principles of logic might be brought to bear by a disputatious generation. So the greatest of inductive philosophers became the hero of a recklessly deductive age, which was both too indolent and too respectful of authority to add to or correct his observations. It was assumed that nothing remained to be done except to understand, expound, and comment upon the writings of a genius to whom all the secrets of nature and of man had been revealed. Even theology, a characteristic creation of the Middle Ages, was greatly affected,

if not dominated, by Aristotle, so that Luther's first act of revolt took the form of an attack upon "that accursed heathen."

Some of his acquaintances in Venice were accustomed, during their conversations together, to suggest some problem of the Aristotelians or to talk about animals; Petrarch says:

"I would then either remain silent or jest with them or change the subject. Sometimes I asked, with a smile, how Aristotle could have known that, for it was not proven by the light of reason, nor could it be tested by experiment. At that they would fall silent, in surprise and anger, as if they regarded me as a blasphemer who asked any proof beyond the authority of Aristotle. So we bid fair to be no longer philosophers, lovers of the truth, but Aristotelians, or rather Pythagoreans, reviving the absurd custom which permits us to ask no question except whether *he* said it. . . . I believe, indeed, that Aristotle was a great man and that he knew much; yet he was but a man, and therefore something, nay, many things, may have escaped him. I will say more. . . . I am confident, beyond a doubt, that he was in error all his life, not only as regards small matters, where a mistake counts for little, but in the most weighty ques-

tions, where his supreme interests were involved. And although he has said much of happiness, both at the beginning and the end of his *Ethics*, I dare assert, let my critics exclaim as they may, that he was so completely ignorant of true happiness that the opinions upon this matter of any pious old woman, or devout fisherman, shepherd, or farmer, would, if not so fine-spun, be more to the point than his."[1]

Commonplace as these reflections seem to us, they resound in the history of culture like a decisive battle in the world's annals. Nor was it mere pettishness which led Petrarch to speak thus of the supreme authority of his age: the instincts and training which made it impossible for him to bow down and worship the Stagirite, implied a great intellectual revolution. Nowhere is the broadening effect of his intelligent and constant reading of the classics more apparent than in his estimate of Aristotle's relative greatness. He was far too intimately acquainted with the history of literature to feel for any one man the respect entertained for their master by the Schoolmen.

[1] "De Sui ipsius et Multorum Ignorantia," *Opera* (1581), pp. 1042, 1043.

The so-called natural science of his day was scornfully put aside by Petrarch as unworthy the attention of a man of culture. Those fond of the subject, he tells us, "say much of beasts, birds, and fishes, discuss how many hairs there are on the lion's head and feathers in the hawk's tail, and how many coils the polypus winds about a wrecked ship; they expatiate upon the generation of the elephant and its biennial offspring, as well as upon the docility and intelligence of the animal and its resemblance to human-kind. They tell how the phœnix lives two or three centuries, and is then consumed by an aromatic fire, to be born again from its ashes." This characteristic mediæval lore he rejects as false, and sensibly declares that the accounts of such wonders as reach his part of the world relate to matters unfamiliar to those who describe them. Hence, such stories are readily invented and received by reason of the distance from the places where the phenomena are said to occur. "Even if all these things were true," he characteristically urges, "they help in no way toward a happy life, for what does it advantage us to be familiar with the nature of animals, birds, fishes, and reptiles, while we are ignorant of the nature of the race of man to which we

belong, and do not know or care whence we come or whither we go?"[1]

The astrologers, so highly esteemed in his day, seemed to him mere charlatans, who were supported by the credulity of those who were madly curious to know what could not be known, and should not be known if it could. Cicero and Augustine had demonstrated the futility of the claims made by the *mathematici*, as they were long called, and Petrarch ratified their judgment; yet so general was the belief in their powers that astrology was taught in the universities of Italy.[2] Even the hard-headed despot of Milan once deferred a military expedition because an astrological friend of Petrarch's declared the proposed time to be unpropitious. The army had, however, scarcely started, with the approval of the astrologer, before such terrible and prolonged rains set in that only the personal courage and good fortune of the prince prevented a disaster. When Petrarch inquired of his friend how he made so grievous a miscalculation, the astrologer replied that it was especially difficult

[1] *Opera* (1581), p. 1038. Steele's extracts from Bartholomew Anglicus, in *Mediæval Lore* (Stock, London), give a good idea of the popular science of the thirteenth century.

[2] *Cf.* Rashdall, *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1895.

to forecast the weather. He received the triumphant retort: "It is easier, then, to know what is going to happen to me alone or to some other individual several years hence, than that which threatens heaven and earth to-day or to-morrow!"[1]

Petrarch's good sense was once or twice tested to the utmost, and yet he refused to give a supernatural explanation even to startling personal experiences, such as still occasionally disturb the precarious adjustment of our generally accepted scheme of the universe. He gives two curious instances of prophetic visions that came true. On one occasion, he had left the bedside of a very dear friend, whose case had been pronounced hopeless by the physicians. Upon his falling into a troubled sleep the sick man appeared to him and announced that he would get the better of his malady if only he were not deserted. There was one already at hand, he said, who might save him. Hereupon Petrarch awoke to find one of the doctors at his door, who had come to comfort him for the loss of his friend. He thereupon compelled the reluctant physician to return to the sick-room: they immediately perceived hopeful signs in the condition of the patient,

[1] *Sen.*, iii., 1; *Opera* (1581), pp. 768, 769.

who was in due time completely restored to health.

The second dream that Petrarch narrates concerned his noble friend, Giacomo of Colonna, who while still a young man had been made Bishop of Lombez, a town not far from Toulouse. Petrarch was, at the time of which we are speaking, at Parma, separated from his friend, as he points out, by no inconsiderable stretch of country.

"Vague rumours of his illness had reached me, so that, swayed alternately by hope and fear, I was eagerly awaiting more definite news. I shudder even now as I recall it all; my eye rests upon the very spot where I saw him in the quiet of the night. He was alone, and crossed the brook that is running before me through my garden. I hastened to meet him, and in my surprise and astonishment I overwhelmed him with questions—whence he came, whither he was going, why he was in such haste, and entirely alone? He made no reply to my queries, but, smiling as was his wont when he spoke, he said: 'Do you remember how you were troubled by the storms of the Pyrenees, when you once spent some time with me beyond the Garonne?[1] I am worn out by them

[1] See below, p. 68.

now, and have left them never to return. I go to Rome.' While saying this he had swiftly reached the limits of the enclosure. I pressed him to permit me to accompany him, but twice he gently repulsed me with a wave of the hand, and finally, with a strange change in his face and voice, said: 'Desist, I do not wish your companionship now.' Then I fixed my eyes upon him and recognised the bloodless pallor of death. Overcome by fright and sorrow, I cried out, so that, as I awoke at that very moment, I heard the last echoes of my own scream. I marked the day and told the whole story to the friends who were within reach and wrote about it to those absent. Twenty-five days later the announcement of his death reached me. Upon comparing the dates, I discovered that he had appeared to me upon the same day upon which he departed this life. His remains were carried to Rome three years later—I, however, neither suspected nor anticipated anything of the kind at the time of my dream. His spirit, as I ardently hope, triumphs in heaven, to which it has returned.

"But we 've dreamed enough, let us awake! I will add but a word. It was not because, in a period of anxiety, first my friend and then

my master appeared to me in a dream, that the one recovered and the other died. In both cases I simply seemed to behold what, in the one case, I dreaded and, in the other, desired, and fate coincided with my vision. I have, therefore, no more faith in dreams than Cicero, who said that for a single one which accidentally came true he was perplexed by a thousand false ones." [1]

Petrarch's enlightenment and scholarship would, however, have availed the world but little, had he not possessed at the same time certain quite different qualities which go to make up the successful reformer. History abundantly proves that one may be far in advance of one's age and yet leave not a solitary disciple behind. In the fourteenth century, to cite one or two instances, a certain Pierre Dubois eloquently advocated the higher education of women and their instruction in medicine and surgery, the study of the modern languages, the marriage of the clergy and the secularisation of their misused property, the simplification of judicial procedure, and a system of international arbitration.[2] But no one, so far

[1] *Fam.*, v., 7.

[2] *Cf. De Recuperatione Terre Sancte*, excellently edited by Ch.-V. Langlois, Paris, 1891.

as is known, gave ear to his suggestions, however salutary: six centuries have elapsed and the world has still but half carried out his programme. While Petrarch was studying law at Bologna, Marsiglio of Padua issued one of the most extraordinary treatises ever produced on government, but, although the circumstances of its publication were favourable to publicity, its influence was imperceptible.

We have, therefore, but half explained the secret of Petrarch's influence if we dwell only upon his profound insight and his moral and intellectual saneness. He might well have been "the first modern" and yet have suffered the fate of many another whom we know to have conceived prophetic ideals. He was in advance of his world, it is true, but he was of it. There was a fundamental sympathy between him and his age. He was mediæval as well as modern. He belonged both to the present and the future. Like Luther and Voltaire, he spoke to a generation that was eagerly and expectantly awaiting its leader, and ready to obey his summons when it should come. Luther was a monk before he was a reformer. Had he been less certain that the devil disported himself in the box of hazel-nuts that he kept on his desk, he might, in just so far, have

exercised a less potent influence over a superstitious people. Had Voltaire been less blasphemous and more appreciative of the true greatness of Hebrew literature, he might never have advanced the cause of humanity.

Of Petrarch's affinities with the culture of his time the reader may form his own judgment from the abundant evidence furnished by the letters. In one important respect he was ever the child of the Middle Ages; he never freed himself from the monastic theory of salvation, although he frequently questioned some of its implications.

His success was not, however, due solely to the gospel that he preached and its fitness for his day and generation. He enjoyed, in addition to these, the inestimable advantage of personal popularity. He was the hero of his age. He was courted, as he says with perfect truth, by the greatest rulers of his time, who omitted no inducement that might serve to draw him to their capitals. He was the friend of successive Popes and of the far-away Emperor himself. The King of France claimed the honour of his presence at the French Court, as Frederick the Great sought that of Voltaire. Luther and Erasmus were scarcely more widely known than he.

It was, however, with men of letters that his influence was most potent. Among his fellows he ruled supreme. His relations with Boccaccio, the greatest of his Italian contemporaries, were especially sympathetic and affectionate, but scarcely less cordial was his esteem for aspiring young Humanists whose names are now forgotten. Of their feelings for him we can judge from the few letters addressed to him that have come down to us. A modest Florentine scholar, Francesco Nelli, who had won the great man's love, tells us of the rejoicing which the arrival of Petrarch's messages occasioned among his Florentine friends.

"Your circle," Nelli writes, "assembled to partake of an elegant repast. . . . Those who live and rejoice in the renown of your name and profess your revered friendship (you will understand me, although I express myself but ill) each brought forth his treasure and refreshed us with its sweetness. . . . Your poem was eagerly read with delight and fraternal good-will. Then we joyously discussed your letters, by means of which you were joined to each of us by a lasting bond of friendship, so that we each silently proved your affection for us by thus producing incontestable evidence. There was no envy, such as is

usually aroused by commendation, no detraction or aspersions; each was bent upon adding his part to the applause aroused by your eloquence." [1]

As the reader turns to the letters themselves, he will soon discover that, in spite of their author's assertions to the contrary, each is a well-rounded and carefully elaborated Latin essay, hardly destined to perform the ordinary functions of a letter. While he believed Cicero to be his model, he allowed himself, whether by some natural inclination or from the fact that he knew them earlier, to follow Seneca's epistles more closely. All trivial domestic matters or questions of business, which he regarded as beneath his own dignity and that of the Latin language, were relegated to a separate sheet, written presumably in Italian, which was much better adapted to every-day affairs than the intractable classical forms which he strove to imitate.[2] But none of these contemned postscripts, interesting as they would probably be to us, have been preserved, and we have not

[1] *Lettres de F. Nelli*, ed. Cochin. Paris, 1892, p. 166.

[2] He says distinctly in one letter: Ad epistolæ tuæ finem de familiaribus curis stilo alio et seorsum loquar, ut soleo. *Fam.*, xx., 2 (vol. iii., p. 11). Again we find: Quidquid hodie æconomicum mihi domus attulit, seorsum altera perleges papyro. *Fam.*, xviii., 7 (vol. ii., p. 486). *Cf.* below, p. 230 *sq.*

a single line of Italian prose from Petrarch's pen.[1]

Although he was fond of saying that he took no pains with his style in his intercourse with his friends, the constant traces of care and revision will scarcely escape the reader. Moreover, these finished communications were not to be treated lightly. "I desire," he says, "that my reader, whoever he may be, should think of me alone, not of his daughter's wedding, his mistress's embraces, the wiles of his enemy, his engagements, house, lands, or money. I want him to pay attention to me. If his affairs are pressing, let him postpone reading the letter, but when he does read, let him throw aside the burden of business and family cares, and fix his mind upon the matter before him. I do not wish him to carry on his business and attend to my letter at the same time. I will not have him gain without any exertion what has not been produced without labour on my part."[2]

The conditions were, indeed, very untoward in those days for regular correspondence between

[1] There is one possible exception, a short address upon the death of the Archbishop of Milan, delivered in 1354; given by Hortis, *Scritti Inediti*, pp. 335 *sqq*. The reader will find a discussion of the editing of the letters below, p. 150 *sqq*.

[2] *Fam.*, xiii., 5 (vol. ii., pp. 232, 233).

friends, and it is natural that the modern note, lightly dashed off and despatched for the most trifling sum, with almost unfailing security, to any part of the globe, should have had no analogy in the fourteenth century. There was in Petrarch's time no regular postal system. Letters were intrusted to a special messenger, or to someone going in the proper direction, pilgrim or merchant. Sometimes a long period might elapse without any opportunity of forwarding a letter, for the scarcity of messengers was as familiar an evil to those living in a great city like Milan as to the solitary sojourner in the wilderness.[1] Once Petrarch resorted to his cook as a messenger. When once under way, there was no assurance that the letter would reach its destination. Many are Petrarch's laments, over the loss of his own and his friends' messages. They were often intercepted and opened, sometimes apparently by autograph-mongers; they might then be returned or not as it pleased those who violated them. Once, as he was returning to Padua, Petrarch came upon two letters from his friend Nelli, in the hands of certain fellows—"not bad men indeed," but those whom he was as much surprised to find interested in such things

[1] *Fam.*, xx., 6 (vol. iii., p. 25).

as if he had discovered "a mole amusing itself with a mirror."

At last Petrarch's patience was quite exhausted and he resolved to give up writing letters altogether. About a year before his death he imparted his purpose to Boccaccio, as follows:

"I know now that neither of two long letters that I wrote to you have reached you. But what can we do?—nothing but submit. We may wax indignant, but we cannot avenge ourselves. A most insupportable set of fellows has appeared in northern Italy, who nominally guard the passes, but are really the bane of messengers. They not only glance over the letters that they open, but they read them with the utmost curiosity. They may, perhaps, have for an excuse the orders of their masters, who, conscious of being subject to every reproach in their restless careers of insolence, imagine that everyone must be writing about and against them; hence their anxiety to know everything. But it is certainly inexcusable, when they find something in the letters that tickles their asinine ears, that instead of detaining the messengers while they take time to copy the contents, as they used to do, they should now, with ever increasing audacity,

spare their fingers the fatigue, and order the messengers off without their letters. And, to make this procedure the more disgusting, those who carry on this trade are complete ignoramuses, suggesting those unfortunates who possess a capacious and imperious appetite together with a weak digestion, which keeps them always on the verge of illness. I find nothing more irritating and vexatious than the interference of these scoundrels. It has often kept me from writing, and often caused me to repent after I had written. There is nothing more to be done against these letter-thieves, for everything is upside down, and the liberty of the state is entirely destroyed.

"To this obstacle to correspondence I may add my age, my flagging interest in almost everything, and not merely satiety of writing but an actual repugnance to it. These reasons taken together have induced me to give up writing to you, my friend, and to those others with whom I have been wont to correspond. I utter this farewell, not so much that these frivolous letters shall, at last, cease to interfere, as they so long have done, with more serious work, but rather to prevent my writings from falling into the hands of these paltry wretches. I shall, in this way, at least escape their inso-

lence, and when I am forced to write to you or to others I shall write to be understood and not to please.[1] I remember already to have promised, in a letter of this kind, that I would thereafter be more concise in my correspondence, in order to economise the brief time which remained to me. But I have not been able to keep this engagement. It seems to me much easier to remain silent altogether with one's friends than to be brief, for when one has once begun, the desire to continue the conversation is so great that it were easier not to begin than to check the flow."[2]

If the letters of Erasmus can, as Mr. Froude suggested, be properly regarded as the most important single source for the history of the Reformation, those of Petrarch must, by reason of the scantiness of other material, be looked upon as indispensable to an understanding of the intellectual life of Italy at the opening of the Renaissance. Still his entire correspondence is by no means available as yet in even a tolerable Latin edition, and, except for an Italian translation, his letters are quite out of the reach of those who cannot

[1] Perhaps with a hope that simple notes would escape the fate of his more polished missives.

[2] *Opera* (1581), p. 546 *sq.*

read them in the original.[1] The editors of the present volume therefore feel no hesitation in offering to the English-reading public a version of some of the more characteristic examples of a correspondence possessing such exceptional interest. They were unfortunately forced to select, since the letters that have been preserved would, if reproduced *in extenso*, fill no less than eight volumes of the size of this. The choice has been determined by a desire to shed all possible light upon the historical rôle of Petrarch and upon the times in which he lived. Some explanations have necessarily been added to the text, but a constant effort has been made to exclude all that was mere erudition or interesting only to the special student. The letters selected have nearly always been given in their entirety and with all possible literalness, for condensation would inevitably have interfered with the true impression which the original produces, even if it served at times to render the book more readable. We can but hope that the choice that we have made will, so far as is possible in so brief a compass, give a correct notion, at first hand, of the extraordinary character with whom we have to do.

[1] M. Victor Develay has turned a part of the correspondence into French, with conscientious fidelity to the original.

I.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Vestro de grege unus fui autem, mortalis homuncio.
Epistola ad Posteros.

Francesco Petrarca to Posterity.

Greeting.—It is possible that some word of me may have come to you, though even this is doubtful, since an insignificant and obscure name will scarcely penetrate far in either time or space. If, however, you should have heard of me, you may desire to know what manner of man I was, or what was the outcome of my labours, especially those of which some description or, at any rate, the bare titles may have reached you.

To begin with myself, then, the utterances of men concerning me will differ widely, since in passing judgment almost every one is influenced not so much by truth as by preference, and good and evil report alike know no bounds. I was, in truth, a poor mortal like yourself, neither very exalted in my origin, nor, on the other hand, of the most humble birth, but belonging, as Augustus Cæsar says of himself, to an ancient family. As to my disposition, I was not naturally perverse or wanting in modesty, however the contagion of evil associations may have corrupted me. My youth was gone before I realised it; I was carried away by the strength of manhood; but a riper age brought me to my senses and taught me by experience the truth I had long before read in books, that youth and pleasure are

vanity—nay, that the Author of all ages and times permits us miserable mortals, puffed up with emptiness, thus to wander about, until finally, coming to a tardy consciousness of our sins, we shall learn to know ourselves. In my prime I was blessed with a quick and active body, although not exceptionally strong; and while I do not lay claim to remarkable personal beauty, I was comely enough in my best days.[1] I was possessed of a clear complexion, between light and dark, lively eyes, and for long years a keen vision, which however deserted me, contrary to my hopes, after I reached my sixtieth birthday, and forced me, to my great annoyance, to resort to glasses.[2] Although I had previously enjoyed perfect health, old age brought with it the usual array of discomforts.

My parents were honourable folk, Florentine in their origin, of medium fortune, or, I may as well admit it, in a condition verging upon poverty. They had been expelled from their native city,[3] and

[1] None of the portraits of Petrarch, not even the well-known one in a codex of the Laurentian library, are authentic, unless it be the one reproduced at the beginning of this volume. See page vii.

[2] Eye-glasses were a somewhat new invention when Petrarch resorted to them. Poggendorf (*Geschichte der Physik*, pp. 93 *sqq.*) cites the first reference to them (1299), which reads as follows: "I found myself so oppressed by age that without the so-called eye-glasses, which have recently been discovered as a godsend to poor old persons, I could neither read nor write." We know little of the construction of these first spectacles. An early German painting (15th century), in the National Gallery at London, shows a saint with a completely developed *pince-nez*.

[3] Petrarch's father and Dante were banished forever from Florence upon the same day, January 27, 1302.

consequently I was born in exile, at Arezzo, in the year 1304 of this latter age which begins with Christ's birth, July the twentieth, on a Monday, at dawn. I have always possessed an extreme contempt for wealth; not that riches are not desirable in themselves, but because I hate the anxiety and care which are invariably associated with them. I certainly do not long to be able to give gorgeous banquets. I have, on the contrary, led a happier existence with plain living and ordinary fare than all the followers of Apicius, with their elaborate dainties. So-called *convivia*, which are but vulgar bouts, sinning against sobriety and good manners, have always been repugnant to me. I have ever felt that it was irksome and profitless to invite others to such affairs, and not less so to be bidden to them myself. On the other hand, the pleasure of dining with one's friends is so great that nothing has ever given me more delight than their unexpected arrival, nor have I ever willingly sat down to table without a companion. Nothing displeases me more than display, for not only is it bad in itself, and opposed to humility, but it is troublesome and distracting.

I struggled in my younger days with a keen but constant and pure attachment, and would have struggled with it longer had not the sinking flame been extinguished by death—premature and bitter, but salutary.[1] I should be glad to be able to say

[1] This is doubtless one of the two or three obscure references to Laura, in Petrarch's correspondence. His frigid statement of the case is characteristic of Petrarch the Humanist as contrasted with Petrarch

that I had always been entirely free from irregular desires, but I should lie if I did so. I can, however, conscientiously claim that, although I may have been carried away by the fire of youth or by my ardent temperament, I have always abhorred such sins from the depths of my soul. As I approached the age of forty, while my powers were unimpaired and my passions were still strong, I not only abruptly threw off my bad habits, but even the very recollection of them, as if I had never looked upon a woman. This I mention as among the greatest of my blessings, and I render thanks to God, who freed me, while still sound and vigorous, from a disgusting slavery which had always been hateful to me.[1] But let us turn to other matters.

the singer. Compare the fervour of the sonnets with the original of this passage :—Amore acerrimo, sed unico et honesto, in adolescentia laboravi, et diutius laborassem, nisi iam tepescentem ignem mors acerba, sed utilis, extinxisset.

[1] Petrarch, although a churchman, was the father of two illegitimate children, a son, Giovanni, born in 1337, and a daughter, Francesca, born, probably of the same mother, some six years later. The unfortunate mother was, according to Petrarch's own story, very harshly treated by him. This obscure *liaison* seems not to have afflicted him with the remorse which his purer attachment for Laura caused him. Only the latter is spoken of, and that at great length, in his imaginary confession to St. Augustine (see below, p. 93 *sqq.*). The son proved an idle fellow who caused his father a world of trouble, even entering into collusion with a band of thievish servants to rob him. The plague cut short his unpromising career in his twenty-fourth year. Petrarch noted in his copy of Virgil, which he used as a family record : " Our Giovanni was born to be a trial and burden to me. While alive he tormented me with perpetual anxiety, and his death has wounded me deeply." The daughter was of a happier disposition. She married, and Petrarch rejoiced in two grandchil-

I have taken pride in others, never in myself, and however insignificant I may have been, I have always been still less important in my own judgment. My anger has very often injured myself, but never others. I have always been most desirous of honourable friendships, and have faithfully cherished them. I make this boast without fear, since I am confident that I speak truly. While I am very prone to take offence, I am equally quick to forget injuries, and have a memory tenacious of benefits. In my familiar associations with kings and princes, and in my friendship with noble personages, my good fortune has been such as to excite envy. But it is the cruel fate of those who are growing old that they can commonly only weep for friends who have passed away. The greatest kings of this age have loved and courted me. They may know why; I certainly do not. With some of them I was on such terms that they seemed in a certain sense my guests rather than I theirs; their lofty position in no way embarrassing me, but, on the contrary, bringing with it many advantages. I fled, however, from many of those to whom I was greatly attached; and such was my innate longing for liberty, that I studiously

dren. One of these, the little Francesco, was, when but a year old, a "perfect picture" of his illustrious grandfather, but the great hopes for the child's future were cut short by its early death. Petrarch comforts himself with the thought that the child "has gained eternal happiness without effort, and by his departure has freed me from a continual source of solicitude." *Sen.*, x., 4. See Fracassetti's Italian translation of Petrarch's letters, *Lettere delle Cose Familiari*, ii., 256; Körting, *Petrarca's Leben und Werke*, Leipzig, 1878, pp. 143 *sqq.*

avoided those whose very name seemed incompatible with the freedom that I loved.

I possessed a well-balanced rather than a keen intellect, one prone to all kinds of good and wholesome study, but especially inclined to moral philosophy and the art of poetry. The latter, indeed, I neglected as time went on, and took delight in sacred literature. Finding in that a hidden sweetness which I had once esteemed but lightly, I came to regard the works of the poets as only amenities. Among the many subjects which interested me, I dwelt especially upon antiquity, for our own age has always repelled me, so that, had it not been for the love of those dear to me, I should have preferred to have been born in any other period than our own. In order to forget my own time, I have constantly striven to place myself in spirit in other ages, and consequently I delighted in history; not that the conflicting statements did not offend me, but when in doubt I accepted what appeared to me most probable, or yielded to the authority of the writer.

My style, as many claimed, was clear and forcible; but to me it seemed weak and obscure. In ordinary conversation with friends, or with those about me, I never gave any thought to my language, and I have always wondered that Augustus Cæsar should have taken such pains in this respect. When, however, the subject itself, or the place or listener, seemed to demand it, I gave some attention to style, with what success I cannot pretend to say; let them judge in whose presence I spoke. If only I have lived well, it matters little to me how

I talked. Mere elegance of language can produce at best but an empty renown.

My life up to the present has, either through fate or my own choice, fallen into the following divisions. A part only of my first year was spent at Arezzo, where I first saw the light. The six following years were, owing to the recall of my mother from exile, spent upon my father's estate at Ancisa, about fourteen miles above Florence. I passed my eighth year at Pisa,[1] the ninth and following years in Farther Gaul, at Avignon, on the left bank of the Rhone, where the Roman Pontiff holds and has long held the Church of Christ in shameful exile. It seemed a few years ago as if Urban V. was on the point of restoring the Church to its ancient seat, but it is clear that nothing is coming of this effort, and, what is to me the worst of all, the Pope seems to have repented him of his good work, for failure came while he was still living. Had he lived but a little longer, he would certainly have learned how I regarded his retreat.[2] My pen was in my hand when he abruptly surrendered at once his exalted office and his life. Unhappy man, who might have died before the altar of Saint Peter and in his own

[1] Petrarch's father, being still an exile, could not return with the family to Ancisa, in Florentine territory, but joined them when they moved to Pisa, which did not in those days belong to Florence.

[2] Urban V. (1362–1370) had transferred the papal court back to Rome after it had remained for sixty years in France and Avignon, but after a year or two the disorder in Italy, as well as his own longing and that of his cardinals for their native land, overcame his good intentions and he returned to Avignon, where he died almost immediately, in December, 1370.

habitation! Had his successors remained in their capital he would have been looked upon as the cause of this benign change, while, had they left Rome, his virtue would have been all the more conspicuous in contrast with their fault.[1]

But such laments are somewhat remote from my subject. On the windy banks of the river Rhone I spent my boyhood, guided by my parents, and then, guided by my own fancies, the whole of my youth. Yet there were long intervals spent elsewhere, for I first passed four years at the little town of Carpentras, somewhat to the east of Avignon: in these two places I learned as much of grammar, logic, and rhetoric as my age permitted, or rather, as much as it is customary to teach in school: how little that is, dear reader, thou knowest. I then set out for Montpellier to study law, and spent four years there, then three at Bologna. I heard the whole body of the civil law, and would, as many thought, have distinguished myself later, had I but continued my studies. I gave up the subject altogether, however, so soon as it was no longer necessary to consult the wishes of my parents.[2]

[1] Petrarch had not only exhorted Urban V. to return to Rome, but had previously sent metrical epistles to his predecessors, Benedict XII. and Clement VI., urging them to restore the papacy to its ancient seat. The letters which Petrarch wrote to his friends in regard to the abominations of the "Babylonish Captivity" form a separate collection of his correspondence, *Epistolæ sine Titulo*, in which the names of those to whom they were addressed are suppressed for fear of compromising them.

[2] The news of the death of Petrarch's father recalled him and his brother from Bologna in April, 1326. *Cf. Fam.*, iv., 1.

My reason was that, although the dignity of the law, which is doubtless very great, and especially the numerous references it contains to Roman antiquity, did not fail to delight me, I felt it to be habitually degraded by those who practise it. It went against me painfully to acquire an art which I would not practise dishonestly, and could hardly hope to exercise otherwise. Had I made the latter attempt, my scrupulousness would doubtless have been ascribed to simplicity.

So at the age of two and twenty[1] I returned home. I call my place of exile home, Avignon, where I had been since childhood; for habit has almost the potency of nature itself. I had already begun to be known there, and my friendship was sought by prominent men; wherefore I cannot say. I confess this is now a source of surprise to me, although it seemed natural enough at an age when we are used to regard ourselves as worthy of the highest respect. I was courted first and foremost by that very distinguished and noble family, the Colonnesi, who, at that period, adorned the Roman Curia with their presence. However it might be now, I was at that time certainly quite unworthy of the esteem in which I was held by them. I was especially honoured by the incomparable Giacomo Colonna,

[1] It seems strange that at twenty-two Petrarch should already have spent some seven years at the universities. It was not, however, unusual then. There were no entrance requirements, and the students were often mere boys. Rashdall places the age of freshmen at thirteen to sixteen years, but they might enter still younger. See *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, vol. ii., p. 604.

then Bishop of Lombez,[1] whose peer I know not whether I have ever seen or ever shall see, and was taken by him to Gascony; there I spent such a divine summer among the foot-hills of the Pyrenees, in happy intercourse with my master and the members of our company, that I can never recall the experience without a sigh of regret.[2]

Returning thence, I passed many years in the house of Giacomo's brother, Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, not as if he were my lord and master, but rather my father, or better, a most affectionate brother—nay, it was as if I were in my own home.[3] About this time, a youthful desire impelled me to visit France and Germany. While I invented certain reasons to satisfy my elders of the propriety of the journey, the real explanation was a great inclination and longing to see new sights. I first visited Paris, as I was anxious to discover what was true and what fabulous in the accounts I had heard of that city.[4] On my return from this journey I went to Rome,[5] which I had since my infancy ardently desired to

[1] Some thirty miles southwest of Toulouse.

[2] It was on this occasion that Petrarch formed his life-long friendship with "Socrates," who lived at Avignon, and with "Lælius," a Roman, who also resided at Avignon until the death of Cardinal Colonna, in 1348. To these two a great many of his letters are addressed.

[3] Petrarch was a commensal chaplain in the house of the Cardinal, as we learn from the Papal document granting him his first benefice, *apud* De Sade, *Mémoires sur la Vie de Pétrarque*, "Pièces justificatives," vol. iii., No. 15.

[4] Petrarch's letters relating to Paris and Cologne are given below, Part iv.

[5] Probably some three years after the journey to the north.

visit. There I soon came to venerate Stephano, the noble head of the family of the Colonnesi, like some ancient hero, and was in turn treated by him in every respect like a son. The love and good-will of this excellent man toward me remained constant to the end of his life, and lives in me still, nor will it cease until I myself pass away.

On my return, since I experienced a deep-seated and innate repugnance to town life, especially in that disgusting city of Avignon which I heartily abhorred, I sought some means of escape. I fortunately discovered, about fifteen miles from Avignon, a delightful valley, narrow and secluded, called Vaucluse, where the Sorgue, the prince of streams, takes its rise. Captivated by the charms of the place, I transferred thither myself and my books. Were I to describe what I did there during many years, it would prove a long story. Indeed, almost every bit of writing which I have put forth was either accomplished or begun, or at least conceived, there, and my undertakings have been so numerous that they still continue to vex and weary me. My mind, like my body, is characterised by a certain versatility and readiness, rather than by strength, so that many tasks that were easy of conception have been given up by reason of the difficulty of their execution. The character of my surroundings suggested the composition of a sylvan or bucolic song. I also dedicated a work in two books upon *The Life of Solitude*,[1] to Philip, now exalted to the Cardinal-bishopric

[1] See below, p. 373 *sq.*

of Sabina. Although always a great man, he was, at the time of which I speak, only the humble Bishop of Cavaillon.[1] He is the only one of my old friends who is still left to me, and he has always loved and treated me not as a bishop (as Ambrose did Augustine), but as a brother.

While I was wandering in those mountains upon a Friday in Holy Week, the strong desire seized me to write an epic in an heroic strain, taking as my theme Scipio Africanus the Great, who had, strange to say, been dear to me from my childhood. But although I began the execution of this project with enthusiasm, I straightway abandoned it, owing to a variety of distractions. The poem was, however, christened *Africa*, from the name of its hero, and, whether from his fortunes or mine, it did not fail to arouse the interest of many before they had seen it.

While leading a leisurely existence in this region, I received, remarkable as it may seem, upon one and the same day,[2] letters both from the Senate at Rome and the Chancellor of the University of Paris, pressing me to appear in Rome and Paris, respectively, to receive the poet's crown of laurel. In my youthful elation I convinced myself that I was quite worthy of this honour; the recognition came from eminent judges, and I accepted their verdict rather than that of my own better judgment. I hesitated for a time which I should give ear to, and sent a letter to Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, of whom I have already

[1] The castle of Cavaillon is close by the valley of the Sorgue.

[2] September 1, 1340, when Petrarch was thirty-six years old.

spoken, asking his opinion. He was so near that, although I wrote late in the day, I received his reply before the third hour on the morrow. I followed his advice, and recognised the claims of Rome as superior to all others. My acceptance of his counsel is shown by my twofold letter to him on that occasion, which I still keep. I set off accordingly; but although, after the fashion of youth, I was a most indulgent judge of my own work, I still blushed to accept in my own case the verdict even of such men as those who summoned me, despite the fact that they would certainly not have honoured me in this way, had they not believed me worthy.[1]

So I decided, first to visit Naples, and that celebrated king and philosopher, Robert, who was not more distinguished as a ruler than as a man of culture.[2] He was, indeed, the only monarch of our age who was the friend at once of learning and of virtue, and I trusted that he might correct such things as he found to criticise in my work. The way in which he received and welcomed me is a source of astonishment to me now, and, I doubt not, to the reader

[1] The invitations to Rome and Paris to receive the laurel crown have a history, as the reader will easily infer. See below, p. 100 *sqq*.

[2] Robert (who died in 1343) was the grandson of that Charles of Anjou (the brother of St. Louis) who had been called in by the popes to succeed the house of Hohenstaufen in the kingdom of Naples and Sicily. He was Petrarch's sovereign (*Fam.*, iv., 3), for Avignon belonged to him as Count of Provence, until sold to the popes by Robert's successor in 1348. Robert had resided at Avignon, 1318–1324. A letter from Petrarch to Robert, dated December 26, 1338, is preserved, as well as a second one (Pisa, April 21, 1341), describing his coronation at Rome: *Fam.*, iv., 3, 7.

also, if he happens to know anything of the matter. Having learned the reason of my coming, the King seemed mightily pleased. He was gratified, doubtless, by my youthful faith in him, and felt, perhaps, that he shared in a way the glory of my coronation, since I had chosen him from all others as the only suitable critic. After talking over a great many things, I showed him my *Africa*, which so delighted him that he asked that it might be dedicated to him in consideration of a handsome reward.[1] This was a request that I could not well refuse, nor, indeed, would I have wished to refuse it, had it been in my power. He then fixed a day upon which we could consider the object of my visit. This occupied us from noon until evening, and the time proving too short, on account of the many matters which arose for discussion, we passed the two following days in the same manner. Having thus tested my poor attainments for three days, the King at last pronounced me worthy of the laurel. He offered to bestow that honour upon me at Naples, and urged me to consent to receive it there, but my veneration for Rome prevailed over the insistence of even so great a monarch as Robert. At length, seeing that I was inflexible in my purpose, he sent me on my way accompanied by royal messengers and letters to the Roman Senate, in which

[1] The Latin—ut eam (scil. Africam) sibi inscribi magno pro munere posceret—may perhaps mean that the king asked that the book be dedicated to him as a *great favour*. If, however, Petrarch was rewarded for the attention, he was only one of the first to enjoy a source of revenue which was well known to later Humanists.

he gave enthusiastic expression to his flattering opinion of me. This royal estimate was, indeed, quite in accord with that of many others, and especially with my own, but to-day I cannot approve either his or my own verdict. In his case, affection and the natural partiality to youth were stronger than his devotion to truth.

On arriving at Rome, I continued, in spite of my unworthiness, to rely upon the judgment of so eminent a critic, and, to the great delight of the Romans who were present, I who had been hitherto a simple student received the laurel crown.[1] This occasion is described elsewhere in my letters, both in prose and verse.[2] The laurel, however, in no way increased my wisdom, although it did arouse some jealousy—but this is too long a story to be told here.

On leaving Rome, I went to Parma, and spent some time with the members of the house of Correggio, who, while they were most kind and generous towards me, agreed but ill among themselves. They governed Parma, however, in a way unknown to that city within the memory of man, and the like of which it will hardly again enjoy in this present age.

I was conscious of the honour which I had but just received, and fearful lest it might seem to have been granted to one unworthy of the distinction; consequently, as I was walking one day in the

[1] Upon Easter Sunday, April 8, 1341.

[2] See below, p. 105 *sq.*

mountains, and chanced to cross the river Enza to a place called Selva Piana, in the territory of Reggio, struck by the beauty of the spot, I began to write again upon the *Africa*, which I had laid aside. In my enthusiasm, which had seemed quite dead, I wrote some lines that very day, and some each day until I returned to Parma. Here I happened upon a quiet and retired house, which I afterwards bought, and which still belongs to me. I continued my task with such ardour, and completed the work in so short a space of time, that I cannot but marvel now at my despatch.[1] I had already passed my thirty-fourth year when I returned thence to the Fountain of the Sorgue, and to my Transalpine solitude. I had made a long stay both in Parma and Verona,[2] and everywhere I had, I am thankful to say, been treated with much greater esteem than I merited.

Some time after this, my growing reputation procured for me the good-will of a most excellent man, Giacomo the Younger, of Carrara, whose equal I do not know among the rulers of his time. For years he wearied me with messengers and letters when I was beyond the Alps, and with his petitions whenever I happened to be in Italy, urging me to accept

[1] The great epic was never really finished (*cf. Fam.*, xiii., 11), and Petrarch came in his old age to dislike even the mention of it. Corradini's edition is the best we have of the poem. An analysis of the *Africa* may be found in Körting, *op. cit.*, 654 *sqq.*

[2] Petrarch returned to Vaucluse in 1342, when he was toward *thirty-eight* years old. There is an air of *Wahrheit und Dichtung* noticeable elsewhere in the letter. It was, for example, probably later, in 1344, on a second visit to Parma, that he bought his house, and then went to Verona, where he found the letters of Cicero.

his friendship. At last, although I anticipated little satisfaction from the venture, I determined to go to him and see what this insistence on the part of a person so eminent, and at the same time a stranger to me, might really mean. I appeared, though tardily, at Padua,[1] where I was received by him of illustrious memory, not as a mortal, but as the blessed are greeted in heaven—with such delight and such unspeakable affection and esteem, that I cannot adequately describe my welcome in words, and must, therefore, be silent. Among other things, learning that I had led a clerical life from boyhood, he had me made a canon of Padua, in order to bind me the closer to himself and his city. In fine, had his life been spared, I should have found there an end to all my wanderings. But alas! nothing mortal is enduring, and there is nothing sweet which does not presently end in bitterness. Scarcely two years was he spared to me, to his country, and to the world. God, who had given him to us, took him again.[2] Without being blinded by my love for him, I feel that neither I, nor his country, nor the world was worthy of him. Although his son, who succeeded him, was in every way a prudent and distinguished man, who, following his father's example, always loved and honoured me, I could not remain after the death of him with whom, by reason especially of the similarity of our ages, I had been much more closely united.

I returned to Gaul, not so much from a desire to

[1] 1349.

[2] Giacomo was killed by his nephew, December, 1350.

see again what I had already beheld a thousand times, as from the hope, common to the afflicted, of coming to terms with my misfortunes by a change of scene.[1] . . . . . .

The preceding brief autobiography, written at the close of his life,[2] does not extend beyond Petrarch's forty-seventh year, and in spite of its peculiar interest it is but a very imperfect sketch, which must be supplemented by the abundant data scattered through the correspondence. In order that the reader may approach the letters with a fuller understanding of the circumstances in which they were written, it is therefore desirable to touch upon certain points which Petrarch neglected in his account of himself, and then to trace his life from his return to Vaucluse in 1351, the last event mentioned in the *Letter to Posterity*, to his death, twenty-three years later.

Of his parents he tells us but little. His father had, before his exile, held a responsible position in the Florentine Republic, and his readiness of speech had caused him to be chosen upon more than one occasion to perform im-

[1] The autobiography breaks off abruptly here; we know not why.

[2] The fact that Petrarch mentions the death of Urban V., which occurred in December, 1370, indicates that the autobiography was written during the last three years of its author's life.

portant public missions. His name, *Petracco*, was changed by his son to *Petrarca;* why, we do not know. It has been suggested that Francesco invented the latter as more rhythmical, or adopted it on account of some hidden symbolic meaning, as four centuries later young Arouet mysteriously chose to call himself Voltaire. It is perhaps safer to look upon the alteration as merely an instance of the Latinisation of proper names, which was quite natural and almost necessary at a time when Latin was so generally employed.

Petracco *père* was a friend of Dante while they lived in Florence together, and when it pleased the citizens of that most beautiful and most famous daughter of Rome to cast them out from her sweet bosom, and they were, as Dante tells us, borne to divers ports "by the dry wind that blows from grievous poverty,"[1] the bonds of friendship were knit the closer, for a community of misfortune as well as of tastes and interests served to bring them together. Petrarch's father was, however, forced by the care of his family to give up his studies. We know nothing of his literary tastes, except that he was an ardent admirer of Cicero; and, although his interest was probably legal rather than literary,

[1] See the pathetic passage in the *Convito*, i., ch. 3.

his son confidently assumes that, had he been permitted by circumstances to continue his intellectual pursuits, he would have reached a high degree of scholarship.[1] Almost the only anecdote recorded of him is a trifling instance of his personal vanity. When somewhat past his fiftieth birthday, he was one day horrified to discover, upon looking into the glass, a single hair verging upon grey. Amazed at this indication of premature decay, he not only filled his own home but roused the whole neighbourhood with his laments. Petrarch adds, with an air of conscious virtue, that his own hair began to grow grey before he reached five and twenty.[2]

The only other kinsman to whom we need refer is Petrarch's brother, Gherardo, who was apparently two or three years his junior. A considerable number of the letters are addressed to him. The two spent much of their early life together, but Gherardo, when about thirty-five years old, turned his back upon the world and entered a Carthusian monastery. Some years later the elder brother felicitated him upon his escape from the exacting cares of a life of fashion: he no longer suffered the

[1] *Fam.*, xxi., 15 (vol. iii., p. 110).
[2] *Fam.*, vi., 3 (vol. i., p. 324).

"piratical tortures" of the curling-iron, and his close-cropped hair left eyes and ears free to perform their functions; the elaborate costume of the fourteenth-century dandy, whose scrupulous folds were liable to be discomposed by every careless movement, had been exchanged for a simple monastic garment, readily donned or laid aside, and affording its wearer no anxiety. Petrarch admits that he is himself still held in bondage, that he still has a partiality for good clothes, though this passion grows hopefully less from day to day. He had, however, worse sins to reflect upon than the elaborate coiffures and tight boots of their frivolous days at Avignon. "What," he asks, for example, "have trivial verses, filled with the false and offensive praise of women,[1] in common with songs of praise and holy vigils?" We shall refer later to these letters addressed to Gherardo, for they afford a convenient illustration of Petrarch's views of that most cherished of mediæval ideals, the monastic life.[2]

Petrarch, like Erasmus and Voltaire, had no place that he could call home, unless it were the hated Avignon, whither he was taken when

[1] Cantiunculæ inanes, falsis et obscœnis muliercularum laudibus refertæ.—*Fam.*, x., 3 (vol. ii., p. 73).

[2] See below, Part VI.

about nine years old. This migration to Provence, to which Avignon then belonged, important as it was in the life of our poet, did not involve so complete a separation from Italian influences as would at first sight appear. The boy had in his earliest years learned the Tuscan dialect, which, Dante impatiently declares, was unreasonably held by the Florentines to be the highest form of Italian.[1] There was on the Rhone a considerable Italian colony, with which Petrarch's family associated, and at Carpentras, not far from Avignon, whither the family moved on account of the cheaper living, the little Checco, as he was familiarly called, had an Italian schoolmaster from Prato. Moreover, his later friends and patrons of the noble Roman house of Colonna undoubtedly maintained their national traditions, in spite of the growing French influences at the papal court.

At school (1315–19) Petrarch soon discovered an extraordinary fondness for Latin. While the other boys were still struggling with the simple Æsop, he was poring over Cicero's works, which fascinated him with their sonorous periods before he could grasp their meaning.[2]

[1] *De Vulgari Eloquio*, lib. i., cap. 13

[2] See *Sen.*, xv., 1 (*Opera*, 946).

His old schoolmaster, Convennevole, was very proud of his pupil, and singled him out as the most illustrious of those whom he had instructed during his sixty years as pedagogue.

Petracco was anxious to provide a career for his son, and not unnaturally chose for him his own profession of the law. Like so many other notable literary spirits since his day, Petrarch began his career in a law school, first at the neighbouring University of Montpellier, and later at Bologna. But while Schumann began composing symphonies at Heidelberg, and intercalated a waltz "here and there between Justinian's Institutes and the Pandects," Petrarch appears to have made some progress in his uncongenial subject, and to have gained the esteem of one at least of his teachers. Of his four years at Montpellier we know practically nothing. The boy was only about nineteen when he removed to Bologna, the greatest of mediæval law schools. His three years here were pleasantly spent with the congenial friends he made among his fellow-students. They took long excursions into the country, often not returning until late at night, but such was the happy security of the time that, even if the gates were closed, they had no difficulty in getting over the dilapidated forti-

fications, which presented no very formidable barrier to active young students. It was during this period that he first visited Venice, then at the height of her glory.

The motives that induced Petrarch promptly to give up the law as soon as he heard of his father's death, are not far to seek. Some of them are noted in his *Letter to Posterity*. One of his professors, whom in later life he sharply criticised for his ignorance of classical philology, accused him, in turn, of cowardly desertion. He replied that it was never wise to oppose nature, who had made him a devotee of solitude, not of the courts; and while he conceded it to be a happy circumstance that he had spent some time in Bologna, he believed himself to have been equally fortunate in leaving it when he did.[1] As an old man, however, he judged these seven years at the universities to have been "not so much spent, as totally wasted."[2]

Once at least (in 1335) Petrarch put his legal knowledge to the test, by acting as counsel for the Correggi in a case involving the control of the city of Parma. The merits of the case need not occupy us; Petrarch be-

[1] *Fam.*, iv., 16 (vol. i., p. 246).
[2] *Sen.*, xv., 1 (*Opera*, 947).

lieved the claims of his client to be just, and he assures us that only the fairest means were employed in his successful defence before the papal consistory.[1] He certainly won the friendship of Azzo di Correggio; and his cordial relations with this equivocal person afford the first example of the sympathetic intercourse which he maintained throughout his life with the distinguished despots of the time.

It is probable that Petrarch's mother soon followed his father to the grave. The modest property which Petracco had accumulated in exile was dishonestly appropriated by the executors, and the brothers were left to shift for themselves. Petrarch almost immediately took orders, but probably did not, as has been generally supposed, ever become a priest.[2] He had to face the same problem that in succeeding centuries confronted those who wished to devote themselves to literature. At a time when an author could expect no remuneration for his work, except perhaps for dedications, he might secure a livelihood by putting himself in the way of preferments in the church, or, as was the custom of the Humanists of the fifteenth

[1] *Fam.*, ix., 5 (toward the end). *Cf.* Körting, *op. cit.*, 99 *sqq.*

[2] See Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, vol. i., p. 3, n. 1, who asserts that "officium quotidianum celebrare," in *De Otio Religiosorum*, does not refer to the celebration of the mass, as previous writers inferred.

century, he might rely upon the patronage of some great prince or prelate. Petrarch enjoyed the advantages of both these sources of income. He was, very early in life, so fortunate as to gain the esteem of the Colonnesi, the most influential of the noble Italian families at the papal court. Giacomo, the youngest of the seven sons of old Stephano Colonna, had been struck by Petrarch's appearance when they were students together at Bologna, and on returning to Avignon and learning of Petrarch's situation he made advances which led to one of the most enthusiastic friendships which the poet records. With his aid and that of his eldest brother, Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, the young writer gained immediate recognition, and did not thereafter want for friends and admirers. It was through the influence of Cardinal Colonna that he received his first benefice, in 1335.

Although Petrarch had, as Dante says of himself, "drunk the waters of the Arno before he had cut his teeth," fate made him, like Dante, a citizen of the world.[1] His life was interrupted by frequently recurring journeys and changes of residence. Scarcely two years had

[1] Nos autem cui mundus est patria, velut piscibus æquor.—*De Vulgari Eloquio*, lib. i., cap. 6.

elapsed after his return to Avignon before an invitation from Giacomo Colonna, newly appointed Bishop of Lombez, enabled him to visit Toulouse and spend a "celestial summer" within sight of the Pyrenees.

But before we trace his various pilgrimages, a word must be said of the curious city in which he and several of his most intimate friends spent much of their life. Avignon, although a town of no great importance when Petracco first brought his wife and family thither, was destined to become one of the great European capitals. Clement V., a Gascon, who had been chosen pope in 1305, summoned the cardinals to Lyons to celebrate his coronation, instead of going himself to Rome. During his pontificate he held his court at various French towns, and resided for a time in the Dominican cloister at Avignon. He was succeeded by the energetic old Frenchman, John XXII. (1316–1334), who was followed by six other French popes, all of whom maintained their court at Avignon. Although they appear to have been, upon the whole, good and upright men, they were all Frenchmen, and deliberately chose to reside in a city but just across the Rhone from France; they thus inevitably sacrificed the cosmopolitan

character that their predecessors had enjoyed at Rome. Moreover, the college of cardinals became largely French, so that the curia soon came to be regarded as a servile exponent of French interests. The national jealousy in Germany was augmented by the long struggle between the popes and Louis of Bavaria, while the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War produced in England a revolt against the claims not only of "French popes," but of popes in general. An added explanation of the ill-repute into which the head of the Church fell is to be found in the extortions of the papal treasury; for it became necessary to repair in some way the deficiency caused by the diminution of the Italian revenue, and to meet the ever-increasing expenses of a scandalously luxurious court. The most loudly decried of the financial expedients of the popes owe their origin, or at least their outrageous extension, to this period.

Petrarch's span of life exactly coincided with the exile of the popes from Rome, and his "fate or his sins" made him a most unwilling citizen of their new home, "the Babylon of the West." He never tires of execrating the city, but we may safely assume that he paints too lurid a picture of its condition when he de-

clares that it was "filled with every kind of confusion, the horror of darkness overspreading it, and contained everything fearful which had ever existed or been imagined by a disordered mind." Although the popes were building a magnificent palace, calling a Giotto to aid in their artistic undertakings, and collecting a large library,[1] Petrarch describes their capital as "a hell on earth," and no longer what it was in his earlier days, although even then the most foul and filthy of places.[2] But doubtless he owed more to his residence in the "windy city" than he was ready to admit. He was willing to share in the good things at the pope's disposal, so long as no duties were involved which would interfere with his cherished freedom. To his sojourn in this great centre of international intercourse may be ascribed, in large part, his wide acquaintance with men of all nations, as well as the profound influence which he exercised over his contemporaries.

It was not long after his return from Bologna that Petrarch first saw his Laura. Twenty-one years later he made a note upon

[1] Described by M. Faucon, in the *Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*, Fas. 43, 50.

[2] *Ep. sine Titulo*, No. 7; also *Sen.*, x., 2.

a fly-leaf of his favourite copy of Virgil, in which he was accustomed to record his bereavements. Placed apart from the others, in order that it might often catch his eye, it reads as follows: "Laura, who was distinguished by her own virtues, and widely celebrated by my songs, first appeared to my eyes in my early manhood, in the year of our Lord 1327, upon the sixth day of April, at the first hour, in the church of Santa Clara at Avignon; in the same city, in the same month of April, on the same sixth day, at the same first hour, in the year 1348, that light was taken from our day, while I was by chance at Verona, ignorant, alas! of my fate. The unhappy news reached me at Parma, in a letter from my friend Ludovico, on the morning of the nineteenth of May, of the same year. Her chaste and lovely form was laid in the church of the Franciscans, on the evening of the day upon which she died. I am persuaded that her soul returned, as Seneca says of Scipio Africanus, to the heaven whence it came. I have experienced a certain satisfaction in writing this bitter record of a cruel event, especially in this place where it will often come under my eye, for so I may be led to reflect that life can afford me no farther pleasures; and, the most

serious of my temptations being removed, I may be admonished by the frequent study of these lines, and by the thought of my vanishing years, that it is high time to flee from Babylon. This, with God's grace, will be easy, as I frankly and manfully consider the needless anxieties of the past, with its empty hopes and unforeseen issue."[1]

This meagre notice contains all that we really know of the woman whose name is associated for all time with that of Francesco Petrarca. While she is, it is hardly necessary to say, the theme of nearly all his Italian lyrics, little or no reference is made to her in the Latin works, with two notable exceptions, to be spoken of later. In the vast collection of prose letters two or three vague allusions to his love for her may be found. Once only is Laura mentioned by name,—in a letter to Giacomo Colonna, who had begun to suspect that the much besung sweetheart was but a play upon words—a personification of the longed-for poet's laurel (*Laurea*). "Would that your humorous suggestion were true," Petrarch replies; "would to God it were all

[1] See the facsimile of this famous entry in Geiger's *Humanismus*, p. 44, and the corrected transcription furnished by M. de Nolhac, *op. cit.*, pp. 407, 408.

a pretence, and not a madness!"[1] From none of these sources do we learn anything of the lady herself. Many ingenious theories have been based upon the descriptions in the *Canzoniere*, which, though often sufficiently detailed, are however poetic, allegorical, and conflicting. The futility of such deductions can be made clear by a single example. Upon no other topic does the poet dwell with more evident pleasure, or more varied detail, than the eyes of his mistress; yet it cannot be determined whether these were blue or dark.[2]

[1] *Fam.*, ii., 9 (vol. i., p. 124).

[2] Many attempts have been made to establish some theory of Laura's life; the most plausible, by reason of the documentary evidence which he adduces, is that given in the eighteenth century by De Sade, in his well-known *Mémoires pour la Vie de Pétrarque* (vol. i., pp. 111 *sqq.*, and appendix; also *Pièces Justificatives*, at the end of vol. iii., containing Laura di Noves's marriage contract, etc.). Even if the documents were not forged or modified by the lawyers of Avignon, in view of De Sade's asserted descent from Laura, and even if, as is not certain, they refer at all to Petrarch's Laura, we learn little or nothing from them. It may be inferred from the *Canzoniere* that Laura belonged to a good family, and almost everyone (except Geiger) agrees, nowadays, that there is every reason to suppose that she was married, since the freedom she appears to have enjoyed and the ornaments she wore, as well as Petrarch's use of the word *Mulier*, all seem to render the assumption a natural one. Any other view would indeed be out of harmony with the habits of an Italian lover of the fourteenth century. The reader who wishes to pursue a somewhat fruitless line of research may compare the views of De Sade with those of Geiger, *Petrarka*, pp. 211 *sqq.*, and Körting, *op. cit.*, pp. 687 *sqq.*, and may proceed from the references there given to the sources themselves, such as they are.

While it must, therefore, be acknowledged that attempts to learn more of the object of Petrarch's devotion have proved unavailing, it is possible, from the material at our disposal, to study satisfactorily and profitably the poet's attitude toward one great preoccupation of humanity, the love of woman. The genuineness of the passion that fills the sonnets, no one who reads the Latin works can doubt, although it is touched upon in only a very few instances. Its reality is attested by two passages of considerable length, which also serve to explain the conflict of emotions depicted in the Italian lyrics. One of these, a Latin metrical epistle to Giacomo Colonna, we may neglect[1]; the other bit of self-analysis it behooves us to examine somewhat carefully, since it casts a flood of light, not only upon the extraordinary man with whom we are dealing, but upon a fundamental contrast between mediæval and modern thought.[2]

Petrarch was, as we have seen, engaged in a lifelong struggle to reconcile the opposing

[1] *Ep. Poet. Lat.*, i., 7, lines 38 *sqq.* A German version of these will be found in Körting, *op. cit.*, pp. 689 *sqq.*

[2] The passage here referred to is in the third book of the Confessions (*Suum Secretum*), *Opera*, pp. 352 *sqq.* Those portions which relate to his love for Laura have been translated into German by Geiger, *Petrarka*, 231 *sqq.*, and summarised by Körting, *op. cit.*, pp. 639 *sqq.* The whole work is translated by Develay into French.

ideals, both moral and intellectual, toward which he felt himself drawn. During his best years the most terrible of his inward conflicts was that between the monk and the self-respecting lover; between the mediæval, ecclesiastical, and the modern, secular, conception of love. By the ecclesiastical, or monkish, conception, we mean the belief in the inherent sinfulness of love, regardless of the relations that may exist between the lover and the object of his affection. This belief was, of course, part of a complex theological system, which owes its formulation, in large measure, to Petrarch's spiritual guide, St. Augustine.[1] A great deal of the unnatural and often indecent twaddle about women which fills the theological works of the Middle Ages may be traced more or less directly to him. It was woman who brought sin into the world in the beginning; it is she who is responsible for its propagation ever since. Man, it is assumed, would be a pure, God-fearing, well-nigh angelic being were it not for the perverse seductions of the other sex. The most scandalous tales were not considered out of place by the preachers of the thirteenth cen-

[1] Peter Lombard reproduces, in the middle of the twelfth century, much of Augustine's reasoning, in his *Sentences*, a work destined to be the standard theological manual for generations to follow.

tury, to illustrate the diabolical origin of woman's charms and the disastrous effects of the only kind of love of which a Jacques de Vitry or the retired inquisitor, Stephen of Bourbon, could form a conception.[1]

In order to discuss the matter in all its bearings, Petrarch chose the form of an imaginary dialogue, his *Secret*, between himself and his favourite ghostly adviser, St. Augustine; and a most extraordinary bit of modern introspective and psychological acumen it is.

In this dialogue, of which some account is given later in this volume, Petrarch defends, with refreshing earnestness, the higher conception of love; but his respect for Augustine, who vigorously asserts the debasing nature of the passion, is too great to permit him ultimately to reject the monkish notions. Much he freely confesses to the Bishop; much is extorted from him by a clever process of cross-questioning. This love for a woman, together with his longing for fame,[2] Augustine declares to be the poet's most conspicuous failings, which serve to bar

[1] *Cf. Anecdotes historiques tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon, publiés pour la Société de l'Histoire de France par Leroy de la Marche*, 1867. Professor Crane, of Cornell, has edited the *Exempla of Jacques de Vitry* for the Folk-Lore Society, London, 1890.

[2] This subject will be considered later. See below, Part VI.

his way to a higher life. Upon Augustine's expressing his astonishment that so superior a mind should languish for so many years in the shameful bonds of love, Francesco passionately declares that it is the soul, the innate celestial goodness, that he loves and admires; that he owes all to her, who has preserved him from sin and stimulated him to develop his greatest powers.[1] These arguments are, however, easily met. The poet is forced to acknowledge that his life has shown only degeneration since he first saw Laura; it was her virtue, not his, which maintained a purely platonic relation between them. His confessor points out that if he looks in the glass he cannot fail to see how the fire of passion and the loss of sleep have made him old before his time. However, he must not despair; let him travel, that may furnish a remedy. But Petrarch has already vainly fled from temptation. Then let him meditate upon the infirmity of the body, and the shortness of life. "Think shame of yourself," his mentor exclaims, "that

[1] *Cf.* the lines:—

Onde s' alcun bel frutto
Nasce di me, da voi vien prima il seme.
Io per me son quasi un terreno asciutto,
Colto da voi; e' l pregio è vostro in tutto—

in the canzone beginning, Perchè la vita.

you are pointed at, and have become a subject of gossip with the common herd! Think how ill your morals correspond with your profession; how this passion has injured you in soul, body, and estate; how much you have needlessly suffered on its account; how often you have been deluded, despised, and neglected! Think how proud and distant your mistress has always shown herself toward you, how you have made her famous and yet have sacrificed yourself, solicitous for her good name when she spent no thought upon your welfare! Separated from God by this earthly love, you have subjected yourself to a thousand miseries. Consider the useful and honourable tasks that you have so long neglected, the many incompleted works that lie before you and that demand your whole energy, not merely the odd moments which your passion leaves free." "Few indeed there be," Augustine characteristically remarks, "who, having once imbibed the sweet passion of desire, manfully endeavour to grasp the truly foul character of woman's person."[1] Consequently they easily relapse with every new temptation. If the poor victim

[1] For Petrarch's views of marriage see *Fam.*, xxii., 1, as well as several unworthy dialogues in *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ*, *e. g.*, i., 45–47; ii., 18, 20, 22.

would be free, he must banish the past from his thoughts; no day or night must elapse without tearful prayers which may, perchance, at last bring divine relief.

It is only by remembering the general condemnation of the love of woman among the ecclesiastical class, which was, up to Petrarch's time, nearly synonymous with the literary class, that we can understand the general form which the discussion takes in the dialogue just outlined. It is his pure affection for a pure woman that fills Petrarch with apprehension. He studiously neglects all other considerations, however important. One possible vague reference to his connection with the church occurs[1]; but there is none at all to the fact that the object of his devotion was, as we may assume, a married woman. If Laura was unmarried, the arguments against the attachment become still more unnatural, as measured by a modern or secular standard. Of that *liaison* which resulted in two illegitimate children no notice is taken, although it would seem a natural subject for criticism upon the part of a confessor like Augustine. The dialogue is therefore a discussion of love at its best. The arguments which Petrarch puts in

[1] Cogita quantum professio tua discordet a moribus.—*Opera*, p. 363.

the mouth of St. Augustine are mainly conventional and monastic, with some suggestions of the interference with work which a literary bachelor would be likely to apprehend.[1] The defence, on the other hand, is purely modern, —modern enough fully to grasp, and even defend against the perversions of monasticism and the current theological speculation, one of the noblest of man's attributes. But Petrarch was too thoroughly conservative in everything touching religion to reject a view of love so systematically inculcated by the church.

Turning again to the course of Petrarch's life, we find him undertaking his first long journey in 1333. He visited Paris, the Netherlands, and the Rhine, and described his experiences in two charming letters to his friend, Cardinal Colonna, who probably supplied him with the means necessary for the expedition. The poet exhibited the same love of travel for travel's sake that was characteristic of his countrymen from Marco Polo to Columbus, but unfortunately the letters describing his impressions of foreign lands are relatively few.[2]

[1] Magnæ corporis magnæ animi vires sunt, quæ simul et litteris sufficiant et uxori.—*Fam.*, xx., 4 (vol. iii., p. 21).

[2] Two or three examples of such descriptions will be found below, Part. IV.

Three years after the journey to the north Petrarch first visited Rome. Both as a Humanist and as a mediæval Christian he had longed to behold that holy city, "which never had and never would have an equal." It was there that Scipio Africanus, the hero of his epic, had dwelt, and there, too, was the resting-place of innumerable other men whose names would never die. He might also, he hoped, wander among the tombs of the saints, and gaze upon the spots that had been hallowed by the presence of the Apostles.[1] Petrarch was much too ardent and sincere a Catholic to allow Brutus and Cato to crowd out Peter and Paul. Indeed there was no break, in his mind, between the history of pagan and Christian Rome. It was to him, as it had been to Dante, a single divine epic: "When David was born, Rome was born; then it was that Æneas came from Troy to Italy, which was the origin of the most noble Roman city, even as the written word bears witness. Evident enough, therefore, is the divine election of the Roman Empire, by the birth of the holy city, which was contemporaneous with the root of the race from which Mary sprang." [2]

[1] See his enthusiastic letter to Giacomo Colonna, who had invited him to undertake the journey.—*Fam.*, ii., 9. [2] *Convito*, iv., 5.

Petrarch might have rejected as faulty Dante's proof from chronology, but they would have agreed that Rome was always peopled not with human, but with heavenly citizens, who were inspired by divine love in loving Rome. "Wherefore," Dante exclaims, "one should not need to inquire further to see that an especial birth and an especial destiny were decreed, in the mind of God, to that holy city. I am of the firm opinion that the stones that remain in her walls are deserving of reverence, and that she is worthy, beyond all that is praised and glorified by men."[1] A similar conviction in Petrarch's mind helps to explain his unquestioning devotion to Cicero and Augustine alike, and his mystical trust in the eternal youth of the hopelessly senile Holy Roman Empire.[2]

He was not disappointed in what he saw, in spite of the apprehension expressed by Cardinal Colonna that the city, in its terrible state of ruin,[3] would seem sadly different from the picture the poet had formed of it in his anticipations. On the contrary, his wonder and admiration were but increased by the sight of

[1] *Convito*, iv., 5.

[2] See below, Part V.

[3] All authorities agree as to the fearful degradation of Rome during the absence of the popes.

what remained of the ancient mistress of the earth. That she should have conquered the world no longer affords him surprise, but only that she did not conquer it sooner.[1]

Upon his return to Avignon, Petrarch found the city more disgusting than ever, and in turning over the question of a more agreeable home he bethought him of a valley not far away, which he had visited in his boyhood, and there he determined to take up his abode. Of the beauties of Vaucluse, where he spent most of the following fifteen years, and of his life and surroundings there, he has given us many a charming picture. This life of literary seclusion in the suburbs of a great city is so essentially modern in character that it serves to bridge the five centuries that separate us from Petrarch and to bring him into sympathy with the scholar and litterateur of to-day.

The form which Petrarch's desire for glory assumed in his earlier days was the aspiration publicly to receive the laurel crown of the poet. One of his most intimate friends came to the conclusion, as we have seen, that this yearning for the laurel had led the poet, by a skilful personification, to delude the world into the belief that it was a woman's charms that held

[1] *Fam.*, ii., 14.

him captive. Augustine is made to say in the Confessions that Petrarch's worldly madness reaches its climax in the worship that he paid, not only to Laura's person, but even to her name, so that he cherished, "with incredible levity," everything that resembled it in sound. "Wherefore thou hast so loved the imperial or poetic laurel, which was called by her name [*Laurea*], that since that time thou hast let scarcely a song escape thee without mentioning it."

However thoroughly convinced he may have become in later life of the vanity of such a distinction, Petrarch appears to have been willing as a young man to resort even to somewhat undignified, if not actually dishonest, expedients to accomplish his end. When he tells us that upon the same day (September 1, 1340) invitations to receive the laurel chaplet reached him from both Rome and Paris, we may safely look, primarily at least, to the poet's own contrivances, for an explanation of this double honour. Up to the time of his coronation he was known only by his Italian verses, since his great epic, the *Africa*, had but just been got under way. He had influential friends, however. At Paris his fellow-citizen Roberto de' Bardi, chancellor of the renowned university,

was ready to do him a good turn ; and at Rome his powerful friends the Colonnesi were in a position to help him to realise his cherished ideal. He seems, nevertheless, to have relied chiefly upon the aid of King Robert of Naples.[1] He was, it must be remembered, a subject of this monarch, to whom Avignon at that time belonged. It was doubtless his friend Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro who first brought the comparatively unknown poet to the attention of the King, and Robert showed his awakened confidence by despatching to him an epitaph of his own composition for criticism. Petrarch was, not unnaturally, dazzled by the royal verses : " Happy the pen," he exclaims, " to which such words were committed ! " Far from venturing any strictures, he is doubtful what he should most admire, the classic brevity of the diction, the elevation of the thought, or the grace of expression.[2] It occurred to him later that he might employ the favour of Robert to gratify his own ambition. The following extract from a letter to Dionisio (January 4, 1339) tells us more, perhaps, than we should wish to know of his plans : " As for me, I intend soon to follow you [to Naples]. You well know

[1] Petrarch confesses that he owed the crown to Robert. *Ecl.*, x., 370 *sqq.*

[2] *Fam.*, iv., 3 (the opening lines).

how I regard the laurel. I have resolved, all things being considered, to be indebted for it to no one else than the King of whom we have just been speaking. If I shall seem sufficiently worthy in his eyes for him to invite me, all will be well. Otherwise, I may pretend to have heard something which will explain my coming, or I will, as if in doubt, so interpret the letter which he sent me containing such friendly and flattering recognition of an unknown man, that I shall appear to have been summoned."[1] Happily, however, subterfuges were unnecessary, as two invitations to receive the laurel came without applying to Robert.

After some feigned hesitation Petrarch chose Rome rather than Paris. There is in reality little doubt that nothing would have induced him to give the preference to any other place than the Capitol, which exercised an unrivalled fascination over his mind. Poets had, during his time, been crowned elsewhere,—Mussato, a poet and historian, at Padua, and his old master, Convennevole, at Prato; but centuries had passed since anyone had been granted cosmopolitan recognition by having the laurel placed upon his head by a Roman senator. In imitation of the Olympian games

[1] *Fam.*, iv., 2 (vol. i., p. 206).

Domitian had, toward the end of the first century, established similar periodical contests in Rome in honour of Jupiter Capitolinus. The victor's brow, according to Martial, was encircled by an oak chaplet; but in other contests held at the Emperor's villa, the laurel crown was given. The later history of the institution is obscure, but the custom doubtless perpetuated itself, and may have lasted until the destruction of the Empire. A vague tradition was current that many poets had received the laurel upon the Capitol. This Petrarch accepted, evidently assuming that the great Augustan writers, whom he so much admired, had enjoyed this distinction; and in his address upon the occasion of his coronation he refers to the numerous distinguished poets who had been crowned before him upon that spot. Statius, who died *circa* 96 A.D., and who must have been one of the first to gain the honour, he cites as the last person recorded to have received it.[1]

As he tells us in his *Letter to Posterity*, Petrarch first betook himself to Naples, where, as a preparation for his coronation, he sub-

[1] Recolo . . . in hoc ipso capitolio romano ubi nunc insistimus tot tantosque vates ad culmen preclari magisterii provectos emeritam lauream reportasse. . . . post statium pampineum illustrem poetam qui domitiani temporibus floruit nullum legimus tali honore decoratum.—Hortis, *Scritti Inediti*, p. 316.

mitted to an examination by the King. Robert was somewhat of a philistine, as we may infer from the fact that Petrarch found it necessary carefully to explain to him the nature of poetry, the function of the poet, and the significance of the laurel, and to defend his noble art against the aspersions of a theological age. However skilled in other matters, the King was but slightly versed in literature. Yet he expressed the conviction that, could he earlier have heard Petrarch's defence, he would have devoted no inconsiderable portion of his time to poetry.[1] Of the details of the coronation very little is known. Petrarch describes it in very general terms in a metrical epistle,[2] and we have besides two or three brief and inaccurate contemporary accounts.[3] The address which he made upon the Capitol has, however, recently been discovered and printed,[4] but it is, unfortunately, a very disappointing composition quite unworthy of Petrarch's powers. His text is a line or two from Virgil:

"But I am caught by ravishing desire, above the lone Parnassian steep,"[5]

[1] *Rerum Mem.*, end of book i.; an interesting estimate of Robert.
[2] *Ep. Poet. Lat.*, ii., 1.
[3] *Cf.* Hortis, *op. cit.*, chap. i., "La Laurea del Petrarca."
[4] *Ibid.*, 311 *sqq.*
[5] *Georgics*, iii., 291, 292, as translated by Rhoades.

but instead of developing his subject, as does Cicero in his defence of Archias, he adopts the repellent, conventional form of the times, pedantically classifying his ideas by headings and numbers, like a scholastic theologian. He extols the laurel in a truly mediæval fashion for its magic virtues in causing its wearer to dream true dreams, and in protecting him from lightning, etc. The most significant part of the address is his defence of poetry.

"The coronation of Petrarch as poet," Körting declares, "is an episode standing alone, not only in the annals of the city of Rome, but in the whole history of mankind. It is an epoch-making event in the fullest acceptance of the word."[1] This may very well be somewhat exaggerated, but the coronation was certainly a solemn attestation of a new interest in culture, although as we have seen by no means a spontaneous tribute, unsought by the poet. Later in life he deprecated the whole affair as a piece of youthful arrogance which left him, in Faust's words, *so klug als wie zuvor.* At the time, however, he was confident that the revival of the custom of Imperial Rome would

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 174. *Cf.* Gregorovius, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom.*, vi., pp. 207 *sqq.*

be a source of glory, not only to the city, but to Italy as a whole.

From Rome Petrarch went northward to Parma, where he arrived most opportunely, since his old friend Azzo di Correggio and his three brothers had just obtained possession of the town. The poet's relations with the professional despot of the time are so cordial and constant as naturally to arouse astonishment in one unfamiliar with the political and social conditions of the period. Yet he but furnishes an illustration of one of the most curious characteristics of the Renaissance, the comradery between the blood-stained tyrant and the man of letters. The "age of despots" and the palmy days of humanism coincide. Tyranny and the revival of classical learning are historically so closely affiliated as to suggest some causal relation. Certain it is that they flourished together, and early in the sixteenth century disappeared together.

The fate of Parma, where Petrarch resided at intervals, and the future career of his beloved and respected Azzo, are too typical of the period to be completely ignored even in this brief sketch. Azzo had first taken orders, but married later, and entered upon the

then recognised *métier* of tyrant.[1] It will be remembered that Petrarch had earlier represented him in a lawsuit involving the possession of a town, and the friendship formed at Avignon remained constant to the end. A lull in the business of the Correggio family led Azzo to make what our less picturesque bosses of the present day would call a "deal." Parma was, at the moment, under the control of the Scaligeri of Verona. Azzo, anxious for even temporary occupation, promised Luchino Visconti of Milan, another of Petrarch's friends, to turn over the town to the Visconti after four years, if he would aid him to dispossess the present proprietors. It was under these conditions that, with the incidental approbation and support of the citizens, the Scaligeri were ousted. Petrarch celebrated the occasion in an enthusiastic ode to Liberty![2]

The administration of the Scaligeri had been execrable, and there was some reason for looking upon the *coup de main* as a deliverance. The brothers, says a chronicler, began to reign not as lords but as fathers, without partiality or oppression of any kind. Had they but per-

[1] *Cf.* Fracassetti, *Let. delle Cos. Fam.*, i., 525 *sqq.*

[2] The canzone beginning, Quel c' ha nostra natura in se più degno.

severed, they might have continued to hold the town forever, but at the end of a year they changed their policy.[1] The most fair-minded of the brothers died, and, regardless of the arrangement for the speedy transfer to Milan, Azzo sold the town, in 1344, to the Marquis of Este, for 60,000 gold florins, hoping to retain the position of governor. This led to a struggle between half a dozen neighbouring despots, and two years later the town was ceded to Milan, on condition that the Marquis of Este should be reimbursed for the sum he had paid to Azzo. Azzo soon made up with his enemies, the Scaligeri, and so far gained their confidence that he was twice appointed governor of Verona. During his master's absence, however, a revolt broke out, which was naturally attributed to him, and the shifty adventurer found that no excuses or explanations would serve to pacify the offended Can Grande. He was obliged to flee, leaving his wife and children in the hands of his incensed lord. For a time he wandered helplessly about among the towns of northern Italy, until Petrarch, who was at that time residing at the court of the Visconti, procured him a comfortable refuge at Milan. As a salve for his wounds, the poet

[1] See Fracassetti, *op. cit.*, i., 527.

dedicated to the ill-starred ex-tyrant, his *Antidotes for Good and Evil Fortune.*[1] We have abundant proof, in both his Latin and Italian verses, of Petrarch's partiality and admiration for this strange character. Upon Azzo's death, he addressed letters of consolation to the widow and children of the deceased, and asserted that in him he had lost that which gave life its especial charm—*Perdidi propter quod præcipue me vivere delectabat!*[2] We must recollect that the affinities which lead to friendship are often obscure, even where our opportunities for observation are most favourable. Petrarch doubtless saw something more than a mere adventurer in this man, who has left so despicable an historical record.

Petrarch lingered in Parma, or its suburbs, about a year, but the election of a new pope, Clement VI. (May, 1342), made it expedient for him to return to Avignon and present his compliments to the head of the church, with a hope, perhaps, of securing some favour that might increase his precarious income from the prebend at Lombez. As we have seen, benefices were regarded, and with justice, as found-

[1] In the dedicatory preface to that work the reader will find an interesting review of Azzo's career.

[2] *Var.*, 16 (vol. iii., p. 337), also *Var.*, 4. For the whole matter see Fracassetti, *Let. delle Cos. Fam.*, i., pp. 525 *sqq.*

ations for the support of indigent scholars. Before returning to Avignon the poet addressed a lengthy metrical epistle[1] to Clement, urging his return to Rome. The Pope accepted some, at least, of the suggestions contained in the letter, and furthermore granted its author a priorate near Pisa.

The quiet life at Vaucluse was resumed only to be again interrupted by a journey to Naples, as representative of the Pope. The mission was not particularly successful, but the letters written from Naples, describing the savage state of the inhabitants and the continued celebration of gladiatorial contests, are of great interest.[2] It was on his return from Naples, while visiting some of the towns of Lombardy (1345), that he discovered at Verona a codex containing Cicero's letters to Atticus, Brutus, and Quintus. They came, however, too late to exercise any important influence upon his own epistolary style.[3] The following two years (1346–7) were spent at Vaucluse, where he made certain improvements in his villa and

[1] *Ep. Poet. Lat.*, ii., 5.

[2] *Fam.*, v., 3, 4, and 5. In the last of these there is a fine description of a terrible storm.

[3] *Fam.*, xxiv., 3; also Voigt, *op. cit.*, p. 42. It has been satisfactorily proved that Petrarch was unaware of the existence of the important collection *Ad Familiares*. *Cf.* de Nolhac, *op. cit.*, 94 and 211 *sqq.*

began his work in praise of the life of solitude. But soon an extraordinary and absorbing political crisis distracted his attention from the amenities of his country home.

Cola di Rienzo, with whose ideas he had been fascinated upon their first meeting, three years before, had suddenly proclaimed himself, in the name of the people, ruler of Rome (May 20, 1347). An explanation of Petrarch's interest in this famous *coup d'état* will be given later in connection with some of the letters which passed between him and the tribune.[1] So fully was his sympathy aroused that late in the year 1347, some six months after Rienzo's accession to power, he resolved to go to Rome and join in the glorious movement of enfranchisement. But, on reaching Genoa, he was arrested by the news of Rienzo's mad conduct, and abruptly gave up the journey southward. After despatching a letter of expostulation and warning, he turned toward Parma, where another prebend had recently been granted him by the Pope. The town, which had fared hardly during the later years of Azzo's rule, was now under the undisputed sway of Luchino Visconti, and Petrarch found the conditions there much improved. We may infer that he now enjoyed a

[1] See below, Part V.

tolerable income from his benefices; he was at any rate able to build himself a house, which still stands at the corner of Borgo di San Giovanni and Vicolo di San Stephano. He seems always to have had a genuine fondness for outdoor life as a relief and recreation. In his garden at Parma he raised choice fruits, and he took pride in the specimens of his horticulture that he sent to Luchino, the lord of the city.

But, in spite of the seemingly favourable conditions, his residence at Parma marks a crisis of affliction and bereavement in Petrarch's life, from which he never entirely recovered. "This year, 1348," he declared long after, "I now perceive to have been the beginning of sorrow." Rienzo, in whose fate he was so deeply concerned, soon weakly abdicated, but not before Petrarch's former friends the Colonnesi had been slaughtered at the gates of Rome. Then came the fearful plague which swept over Italy and far beyond, and which Boccaccio has pictured in his introduction to the *Decameron*. "Life is but one long agony" —*Magnus dolor est vivere*—our poet cried in desperation, as bereavement after bereavement was announced to him. The death of Laura and of Cardinal Colonna severed the two dominant attachments of his earlier life. Many

other friends fell victims to the same fearful disease, among them Roberto de' Bardi, who had procured him the invitation to receive the laurel at Paris, and Luchino Visconti himself.

We may infer that the once attractive Parma now aroused only sombre associations. Petrarch wandered for a time hither and thither, but at the end of 1348 he appears to have taken up a transitory residence at Padua, at the urgent invitation of its ruler, Giacomo II. of Carrara. Here, as he tells us, he was received as the blessed are welcomed in heaven. His new friend was a typical despot, who had murdered his cousin, the legitimate successor, and was himself murdered a few years later (December, 1350), by his nephew. He proved himself, nevertheless, a wise ruler and an enthusiastic friend of literature; he, too, gave Petrarch a prebend, in order to keep him at his court. In the poet's admiration for this man we perceive the same instinctive deference to political sagacity that led Machiavelli to declare Cæsar Borgia to be the model of princes.

The year 1350 had been designated as a year of jubilee, a timely occasion for the exhibition of the devotion stimulated by the terrible calamities of the preceding years. With mediæval fervour Petrarch joined the pilgrims

bound for Rome. On his way southward he visited Florence for the first time, and for the first time saw face to face his greatest literary contemporary and most sympathetic friend, Giovanni Boccaccio. At Rome he did not neglect to visit the various churches and perform the usual devotions. Writing to a friend a little later, he declares that it was providentially arranged that they did not meet in Rome, else, instead of visiting the churches *devotione catholica*, they would, careless of their souls, have wandered about the city *curiositate poetica*, for, however delightful intellectual pursuits may be, they are as nothing unless they tend to the one great end.[1] But the stay in Rome was short, and we have no picture of the impressions which this international mediæval "revival" produced upon the enlightened traveller.

This visit to his father's native city of Florence had suggested to its people the idea of re-establishing the distinguished son of their exiled fellow-citizen in his rights; they even extended to him an invitation to occupy a position in their newly founded university. For these attentions the poet thanked the Florentines warmly, but discreetly put aside the suggestion of the university position. He had

[1] *Fam.*, xii., 7 (vol. ii., p. 186).

estimated fairly the quality of Florentine admiration, and preferred the patronage of the despots. He felt, instinctively, the danger to his reputation from continued contact with his carping, novelty-loving, outspoken compatriots. Some years later (1363), in a moment of irritation at the comments made by the Florentines upon a portion of his great epic which had, by accident, fallen into their hands, he writes to Boccaccio that the wise prince, Frederick II., who knew the nation well, concluded that "all familiarity with the Italians should be avoided, since they are extremely curious and perceive all too quickly the defects of others. They pass judgment upon everything, not only upon the truth, but upon what they have entirely misconceived, so that everything is turned to ridicule that is not just what they would have it. Such is their presumption that they esteem themselves capable of criticising anything and everything." "I will not," Petrarch continues, "discuss the truth of this opinion, but I believe myself to be right in saying that if these words were applied not to the Italians at large but to our fellow-citizens, nothing could be truer or more to the point. With them there is no such thing as intimacy and friendship, but only censure, and that by no

means mild and benevolent, but harsh and inexorable. There is no one among them who, although he may be more lax than Sardanapalus in his conduct, does not outdo Fabricius or Cato in the severity of his judgments. But I will not discuss their views of things which have nothing to do with my case. In dealing with literature they seem to assume that nothing is properly expressed which does not tickle their own great spreading ears. . . . Elsewhere, even beyond the Alps and the Danube, my poor verses have encountered no fault-finders; but nothing fills the Florentines with such horror as the mention of a fellow-citizen. It is not I alone who suffer; anyone who would rise above the common level becomes thereby a public enemy. Believe me, my friend, you who sympathise so fully in my indignation at the wrong I suffer, believe me, we were born in a city[1] where to praise one, is to reproach many."[2] Petrarch had doubtless

[1] Ex ea urbe nati sumus, an inexact expression, since neither was born in Florence, but a confession that they both felt themselves to be Florentine citizens.

[2] *Sen.*, ii., 1 (*Opera*, p. 751). Note Dante's bitterly sarcastic characterisation of the Florentine readiness to express an opinion, in the *Purgatorio*, vi., especially lines 127 *sqq.*:

> Molti han giustizia in cuor; ma tardi scocca,
> Per non venir senza consiglio all' arco:
> Ma 'l popol tuo l' ha in sommo della bocca.

long harboured such feelings, and wisely chose not to risk the danger, upon which both he and Dante dwell, of the contempt which comes from close intercourse.

In June, 1351, after four years filled with bereavement and anxiety, we find Petrarch back in his old surroundings at Vaucluse. During his brief stay here he was called upon to co-operate in no less a task than the drafting of a constitution for Rome. The Pope, convinced by the disorders of the past years that some change was necessary, deputed a commission of cardinals to prepare a new form of government, and they, aware of Petrarch's familiarity with the conditions in Rome, asked his co-operation. Those curious to study the poet as constitution-monger will find his plan among his letters.[1] The power, he urged, should be given back to the people, and the barons should be excluded, for the time being, from the government. It was about this time that he avoided accepting an onerous papal secretaryship which his friends were anxious to force upon him, by ingeniously submitting so elegant a sample of his style that he was rejected on the ground that he could not write in the barbarous but official forms of the curia.[2]

[1] *Fam.*, xi., 16 and 17. [2] *Fam.*, xiii., 5.

Pope Innocent VI., who followed Clement VI. at the close of the year 1352, was an exceptionally unenlightened person, who, from Petrarch's well-known fondness for Virgil, inferred that he must be addicted to magic. After the confidence and respect that he had enjoyed under the preceding popes, Innocent's suspicions appeared to him intolerable, and doubtless supplied one of the motives which led him definitely to abandon his old haunts. The death, or departure from Avignon, of many of his friends, and the loss of his trusted and faithful housekeeper at Vaucluse, had helped to render the city and its surroundings more distasteful than ever, and in May, 1353, he left the region forever and joyfully saluted his own dear Italy:

> Salve cara Deo tellus sanctissima salve,
> . . . agnosco patriam gaudensque saluto,
> Salve pulchra parens, terrarum gloria salve.[1]

Luchino Visconti had, at his death in 1349, been succeeded in Milan by his brother, the famous Bishop Giovanni, from all accounts one of the greatest rulers of his century. Like his brother, he was an admirer of literature, or at least he realised that the presence of distin-

[1] *Ep. Poet. Lat.*, iii., 24.

guished scholars at his court might enhance his influence; and by the mild but potent aid of science and letters he sought, as Rousseau declares the tyrant is wont to do, "to overspread his iron chains with garlands of flowers." His rule could not but receive a certain sanction, which would serve to give it an air of legitimacy in the eyes of the Italians, if Petrarch, the exponent of Italian patriotism, could be induced to come and reside in his capital. The now homeless poet, while doubtless flattered by the august attentions of the Bishop, evidently felt some hesitation in accepting his hospitality. He objected on the ground that the noise of a city disturbed him; he feared, too, that his duties towards his new lord might restrict his now inveterate and somewhat vagrant fondness for liberty and change. But upon his inquiring what was expected of him, the Bishop replied that he asked only his presence, "which, he believed, would grace both himself and his reign."[1] To his scandalised friends in republican Florence the poet confesses that he was induced to stay, partly because he was quite at a loss where else to go, and partly out of respect for the ill-disguised commands of "the greatest

[1] *Fam.*, xvi., 12 (vol. ii., p. 403). *Cf.* also *Fam.*, xvii., 10.

of the Italians." He defends himself against the reproaches of Boccaccio and other friends on the ground that he has in no way sacrificed his freedom; but he admits that it will be no such easy matter to convince the public of the purity of his motives.[1]

A commodious house was selected for the new-comer in the retired western portion of the city, where he could look out upon the church of St. Ambrose, and, far beyond the walls, could see the snowy circle of the Alps. Eight years were spent in Milan, which, under the Visconti, was rapidly becoming the busy capital of a small but important European state. There is no reason to think that Petrarch did not sincerely love the solitude and quiet delights of the country, but, like many a modern man of letters, he recognised that urban life, if an evil, was after all a necessary one. It is probable, too, that, like the later Humanists, he was dependent upon princely patronage for the funds required to support himself and to hire the necessary copyists, since his benefices appear to have afforded him an insufficient income. Whatever his motives, the precedent

[1] *Cf.* close of *Fam.*, xvi., 12. For Boccaccio's words of protest, see Corazzini's edition of his letters, p. 47 *sqq.* Nelli did not join in the criticisms of the other friends, but advised him to do as he pleased. See his letter (x.), in the edition of Cochin.

was established, and later Humanists were not only subservient to princes, but even resorted to a species of blackmail, by threatening, if money was not forthcoming for dedications, to blast the reputation of the offender to all coming generations.[1]

That Petrarch was a member of the Bishop's council of state is not probable, but he certainly delivered more than one address upon solemn occasions, and undertook several embassies for the Visconti. Bishop Giovanni lived but a year and a half after his arrival, and was succeeded by his three notorious nephews, Matteo, Bernabò, and Galeazzo, the first of whom soon died, leaving the possessions of the Visconti to be divided between the two other brothers.

No very satisfactory history of the Visconti has been written; the opinions of their contemporary judges, as well as of later writers, are exceedingly contradictory. In reaching a conclusion as to the character of the more prominent members of the family, the reader may always choose between the seemingly irreconcilable epithets of *vir diabolicus* and *pater patriæ*. There is nothing extraordinary in this, however, and when the earnest investigator has examined all the testimony he will

[1] See the amusing instances cited by Voigt, *op. cit.*, i., 446 *sqq.*

doubtless accept both titles, for they are not really incompatible. All periods offer instances of the most conflicting qualities in the leaders of men, and the Renaissance was especially rich in examples, from the conduct of Boniface VI., that upright and conscientious savage, who read the hours in a loud voice as he walked up and down near the place of torture, listening to the cries of his aged victims,[1] to the licentious pranks which Cellini narrates of himself and his fellow-artists. Especially common are the examples of bad men who were unquestionably great statesmen. It may be true that Galeazzo Visconti introduced the most hideous system of producing death, by a carefully graduated process of mutilation, but it may be equally true that he himself suffered tortures of gout little inferior to those of the unfortunate criminal with a fortitude and equanimity which brought tears to the eyes of his attendants. For years he not only endured these torments with patience, but, according to Petrarch, carried on his government with magnanimity and foresight, and when fortune went against him,[2] exhibited a high degree of philosophical resignation. The same man who

[1] *Cf.* Dietrich von Niehm, *De Scismate*, ed. Erler, p. 94.

[2] *Sen.*, viii., 3 (*Opera*, p. 836).

induced his courtiers to play at dice to their undoing, might conciliate the learned by supporting scholars or establishing a university. The magnificent palace at Pavia, although one of the most beautiful in the whole world, as Corio declares,[1] may well have sadly afflicted the tax-payer. The public man, whatever his character and aims, is pretty sure, if he rises above mediocrity, to be accused of unscrupulousness. The expedients of a fifteenth-century tyrant were doubtless of a fiercer stamp than the shifts of to-day, but that need not prevent our understanding the admiration expressed by Petrarch or Machiavelli for the better qualities of a Giacomo di Carrara, a Galeazzo Visconti, or a Cæsar Borgia.

The sojourn at Milan was interrupted, as we have said, by several diplomatic missions. In November, 1353, Petrarch was sent to Venice to try to arrange a peace between that city and Genoa. But his eloquence was vain, and the war was continued, in spite of a personal letter of expostulation to the Doge.[2] Of Petrarch's relations with the Emperor Charles IV. something will be said later.[3] In 1356,

[1] *Historia di Milano* (ed. of 1565), p. 567.
[2] *Fam.*, xviii., 16.
[3] See below, Part V.

the year after he first met Charles in Italy, Petrarch was sent to Prague as the representative of the ruler of Milan. He tells us little or nothing of his experiences, but he evidently made several friends in this northern centre of culture, with whom he continued to correspond after his return, thereby greatly widening the scope of his influence.[1] Still a third mission remained, which was to carry him beyond the Alps. King John of France had, in 1356, been defeated by the Black Prince and carried a prisoner to England, where, four years later, he gained his freedom only by the payment of an enormous ransom. At this juncture Galeazzo Visconti offered him timely pecuniary aid, upon condition that his son, Gian Galeazzo, should marry King John's daughter. The match was promptly arranged, and the nuptials took place in October, 1360. It then seemed only proper that Galeazzo should give some formal proof of the satisfaction he felt at King John's release, and Petrarch was chosen as a fitting person to carry his congratulations. The King and his court were so delighted with the poet that they would

[1] For the humanistic tendencies at Prague, see Voigt, *op. cit.*, ii., 261 *sqq.*, and Friedjung, *Kaiser Karl IV. und sein Antheil am geistigen Leben seiner Zeit*, Vienna, 1876.

gladly have induced him to remain at Paris. This was, as Petrarch complacently points out in a letter to the Emperor Charles, but another proof of the skill of the astrologer who had long before predicted that he would be upon terms of intimacy with almost all the great princes of his age.[1]

A new outbreak of the plague, the invasion of the mercenary troops (*compagnies*) which had been left without resources by the temporary cessation of the Hundred Years' War, and personal bereavement in the death of his son and of his friend "Socrates," all served to cast a shadow over the opening years of the period covered by the *Letters of Old Age* (1363–1374). The plague, which had spared Milan in 1348, raged there with especial fury in 1361, and compelled Petrarch to leave the city. After a time of hesitation, during which he resolved first to return to Vaucluse, and then to accept Charles's invitation to Prague, he was forced, by the uncertainty of the roads, to give up both plans. He decided in the fall of 1362 to establish himself in Venice. Here he was furnished with a mansion, on the Riva degli Schiavoni, upon the condition that he should leave his library to the city. But,

[1] *Fam.*, xxiii., 2 (vol. iii., p. 184).

while Venice fulfilled her part of the bargain, the books, as we have seen, were never delivered.[1] The quiet of the city and its freedom from the martial turmoil of Lombardy, as well as the circumstance that it was the home of his daughter, who was happily married to a young nobleman,—all served to make Venice an attractive refuge. The city was naturally much visited by travellers, and Petrarch often had the pleasure of entertaining distinguished guests in his charming home, from the windows of which he could look off upon the busy harbour. Boccaccio came to see him more than once, but would not consent, in spite of Petrarch's entreaties, to make his permanent home with him.

The rest of the story is soon told. After five years at Venice the restless old man moved to Padua, where Francesco di Carrara, the son of his former friend, was in power. It was for this younger prince, with whom he lived upon the happiest terms, that he composed his little work upon *The Best Form of Government*.[2] This affords, as may readily be inferred, a marked contrast to the practical suggestions of Machiavelli's famous hand-book. The latter, however, only formulated princi-

[1] See above, p. 31 *sqq*.

[2] *Opera*, pp. 372 *sqq*.

ples of conduct already discovered by the very house of Carrara for which Petrarch prepared his manual.

Distracted by the noise of the city, which his failing health rendered the more distressing, the poet found a charming home at Arquà, pleasantly situated in the Euganean Hills, some twelve miles south of Padua. In this new Vaucluse he passed, with few interruptions, the last four years of his life. He was found by his attendants upon the 18th of July, 1374, his face bowed upon the book before him, dead.

During the long life that we have just reviewed Petrarch allowed scarcely a day to pass without writing one or more letters. The historical importance and multiform interest of his correspondence have already been dwelt upon. Letter-writing was, as he was aware, a veritable passion with him, which was destined to retain its hold until the very end. He frequently reasoned about it with characteristic self-consciousness, and the reader will note many allusions to the subject throughout the present collection. There is, however, one particularly full discussion of his feelings to-

wards his favourite literary occupation, which is to be found in the following dedicatory preface, written, probably in 1359, as an introduction to his first collection of letters. In many ways it is one of the most suggestive of the epistles and merits careful study.

Petrarch's Preface to his First Collection of Letters

To his Friend "Socrates" [1]

What now, brother? We have tried almost everything, and nowhere have we found peace. When may we hope for that, and where shall we seek it? Time, as the saying is, has slipped between our fingers. Our early hopes are buried with our friends. The year 1348 has left us solitary and bereaved; and has taken from us what all the wealth of Ormus and of Ind could never replace.[2]

Such final losses are irreparable, and the wounds inflicted by death can never be healed. There is but one source of consolation; we shall soon follow those who have gone before. How long we must wait we know not. But this we do know, it can-

[1] Of "Socrates," as Petrarch chose to call one of his most intimate friends whose real name was Ludovico, we know almost nothing. He was born in the Netherlands but appears to have spent most of his life in Avignon, where he died in 1362. Although he never visited Italy he would seem to have been thoroughly Italian in his tastes.

[2] Laura, Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, and other friends of Petrarch fell victims to the plague in that year.

not be for long; and the delay, however short, will not be without its trials. Yet let us, here at the outset at least, refrain from lamentation.

I do not know, brother, what anxieties are weighing upon you or what your present preoccupations may be. As for me, I am making up my bundles and, as those on the verge of departure are wont to do, I am trying to decide what to take with me, what to distribute among my friends, and what to throw into the fire. At any rate, I have nothing to sell. I possess, or rather am burdened by, more than I supposed. I found, for example, a vast store of scattered and neglected writings of different kinds in the house. I have laboriously exhumed boxes, buried in dust, and bundles of manuscript, half-destroyed by time. The importunate mouse as well as the insatiable bookworm, have plotted against me, and, a devotee of Pallas, I have been entangled in the toils of Pallas's enemy, the spider. There is, however, no obstacle which may not be overcome by persistent effort. Surrounded by the confused masses of letters and manuscripts I began, following my first impulse, to consign everything to the flames, with a view to escaping from the inglorious task of assorting the papers. Then, as one thought springs from another, it occurred to me that, like a traveller weary by reason of the long road, I might well look back as from an eminence, and step by step review the history of my younger days.

This counsel prevailed. It seemed to me, if not an exalted undertaking, at least not a dis-

agreeable one, to recall the shifting feelings and sentiments of earlier times. But, taking up the disordered papers at random, I was astonished to see how distorted and blurred the past appeared to me, not of course that it, but rather that my mental vision, had changed, so that I hardly recognised my former self. Still, some things that I happened upon called up pleasant reminiscences of long ago. Some of the productions moved with the free step of prose, some were held in check by Homeric reins (I have rarely used those of Isocrates),[1] others, destined to charm the ear of the people, also obeyed their own appropriate laws. The last mentioned style of verse, revived, it is said, not many generations ago, among the Sicilians, spread in a short time throughout Italy, and even beyond. This kind of poetry was held in great repute by the earliest writers among the Greeks and Romans, and the common people of Rome and Athens are said to have been accustomed to the rhythmical lyrics only.

This chaotic medley kept me busy for several days, and, although I felt the potent charm and natural partiality which are associated with all one's own productions, the love for my more important works finally got the upper hand. These had suffered a long interruption and were still uncompleted, although they were anxiously awaited by not a few. The shortness of life was borne in upon me. I feared, I must confess, its snares and pit-

[1] It was probably Cicero's expressions of admiration in *De Oratore* which led Petrarch to choose Isocrates as typifying the oratorical style.

falls. What indeed is more transient than life, and what more certain than death ? It occurred to me to ask what foundation I had laid, and what would remain to me for all my toil and vigils. It seemed a rash, an insane thing, to have undertaken such long and enduring labours in the course of so brief and uncertain an existence, and thus to scatter my talents, which would scarcely suffice for the successful accomplishment of a single undertaking. Moreover, as you well know, another task awaits me more glorious than these in proportion as actions merit more enduring praise than words.[1]

But why dwell longer upon this matter ? It will perhaps seem incredible to you, but it is none the less true, that I committed to Vulcan for correction a thousand or more scattered poems of all kinds and letters of friendly intercourse, not because I found nothing in them to my liking, but because they involved more work than pleasure. I did this, however, with a sigh, as I am not ashamed to confess. But with a mind so occupied it was necessary to resort even to somewhat harsh measures for relief, just as an overburdened ship must sometimes be lightened by the sacrifice of valuable cargo.

After disposing of these I noticed, lying in a corner, a few papers which had been preserved rather by accident than intention, or had, at some former time, been copied by my assistants, and so in one way or the other had escaped the perils of advancing age. I say a few—I fear they will seem a great many to the reader, and far too numerous to the

[1] This reference is obscure.

copyist. I was more indulgent to these, and allowed them to live, not so much on account of their worthiness as of my convenience, for they did not involve any additional labour of my own. As I considered them with regard to the natural inclinations of two of my friends, the prose fell to you, while the verse I decided to dedicate to our friend Barbato. I recollected that this used to be your preference, and that I had promised to follow your wishes. My mood was such that I was on the point of destroying everything which I came across, not even sparing those writings just mentioned, when you both seemed to appear to me, one on my right and one on my left, and, grasping my hands, you admonished me in a friendly manner not to do violence at once to my good faith and your anticipations. This was the chief reason why these were spared, for otherwise, believe me, they would have gone up in smoke like the rest.

You will read your portion of what remains, such as it is, not only patiently, but even eagerly. I do not venture to repeat the boast of Apuleius of Madaura, " Reader, you have but to listen to be charmed "; for on what grounds could I venture to promise pleasure to the reader ? But, you at least, will read the letters, my good Socrates, and, as you are very fond of your friends, you may discover some charm in them. Your partiality for the author will make his style pleasing (indeed what beauty of style is likely to be perceived by an unfriendly judge?); it is vain to adorn what already delights. If anything gratifies you in these letters of mine, I freely

concede that it is not really mine but yours; that is to say, the credit is due not to my ability but to your good-will. You will find no great eloquence or vigour of expression in them. Indeed I do not possess these powers, and if I did, in ever so high a degree, there would be no place for them in this kind of composition. Even Cicero, who was renowned for these abilities, does not manifest them in his letters, nor even in his treatises, where, as he himself says, the language is characterised by a certain evenness and moderation. In his orations, on the other hand, he displayed extraordinary powers, pouring out a clear and rapid stream of eloquence. This oratorical style Cicero used frequently for his friends, and against his enemies and those of the republic.[1] Cato resorted to it often on behalf of others, and for himself four and forty times. In this mode of composition I am wholly inexperienced, for I have been far away from the responsibilities of state. And while my reputation may sometimes have been assailed by slight murmurs, or secret whisperings, I have so far never suffered any attack in the courts which I must needs avenge or parry. Hence, as it is not my profession to use my weapons of speech for the defence of others, I do not frequent the tribunals, nor have I ever learned to loan my tongue. I have, indeed, a deep repugnance for such a life, for I am by nature a lover of silence and solitude, an enemy of the courts, and a contemner of wealth. It was fortunate for me that I was freed from the necessity of resorting to a weapon which I might not have been

[1] Reading *reipublicæ* for *rempublicam*.

able to use if I had tried. I have therefore made no attempt to employ an oratorical style, which, even if it had been at my disposal, would have been uncalled for in this instance. But you will accept this homely and familiar language in the same friendly spirit as you do the rest, and take in good part a style well adapted to the sentiments we are accustomed to express in ordinary conversation.

All my critics, however, are not like you, for they do not all think the same, nor do they all love me as you do. But how can I hope to please everybody, when I have always striven to gratify a few only? There are three poisons which kill sound criticism, love, hate, and envy. Beware lest through too much love you should make public what might better be kept concealed. As you are guided by love, so others may be influenced by other passions. Between the blindness of love and that of jealousy there is indeed a great difference in origin, but not always in effect. Hate, to which I have assigned a middle place, I neither merit nor fear. Still it can easily be so arranged that you may keep and read my trifling productions for your own exclusive pleasure, thinking of nothing except the incidents in our lives and those of our friends which they recall. Should you do this, it would be most gratifying to me. In this way your request will have been satisfied and my reputation will be safe. Beyond this I do not deceive myself with the vain hope of favour. For how can we imagine even a friend, if he be not an *alter ego*, reading without weariness such a mass of miscellaneous and conflicting recollections? There

is no unity in the themes or composition of the letters, and with the various matters treated went varying moods, which were rarely happy and usually despondent.

Epicurus, a philosopher held in disrepute among the vulgar but esteemed by those better able to judge, confined his correspondence to two or three persons—Idomeneus, Polyænus, and Metrodorus. Cicero wrote to hardly more, to Brutus, Atticus, and the other two Ciceros, his brother and son. Seneca wrote to few except his friend Lucilius. It obviously renders felicitous letter-writing a simple matter if we know the character of our correspondent and get used to his particular mind, so that we can judge what he will be glad to hear and what we may properly communicate. But my lot has been a very different one, for heretofore almost my whole life has been passed in journeying from place to place. I might compare my wanderings with those of Ulysses; and certainly were we only on the same plane in reputation and in the fame of our adventures, I might claim that he had not wandered farther or been cast upon more distant shores than I. He was already well advanced in years when he left his native land, and, since nothing is long in our lives, the experiences of his old age were necessarily brief indeed: I, on the other hand, was conceived and born in exile, costing my mother such grievous pangs, and in such critical circumstances, that not only the midwives but the physicians long believed her to be dead. Thus I began to encounter dangers before I was born, and attained the threshold of life

under the auspices of death. The event is commemorated by the no means insignificant city of Arezzo,[1] whither my father, driven from his country, had taken refuge, together with many another worthy man. Thence I was taken in my seventh month and carried about all over Tuscany by a certain sturdy youth, who wrapped me up in a cloth, just as Metabus did Camilla, and bore me suspended from a knotty staff, so as not to injure my tender body by any rough contact. But once, in crossing the Arno (I delight to recall with you the beginnings of my tribulations), his horse stumbled and he fell into the water, and while striving to save the burden entrusted to him he nearly sacrificed his own life in the raging flood.

Our wanderings through Tuscany finally ended at Pisa. From here, however, I was dragged away again, in my seventh year,[2] and in our journey to France by sea we were wrecked by winter storms, not far from Marseilles, and I was on the verge of being summoned away anew from the vestibule of life.—But I am straying from my subject. From then until now I have had little or no opportunity to stop and take breath. How many and how various the dangers and apprehensions I have suffered in my migrations no one, after myself, better

[1] Petrarch learned upon visiting Arezzo, as he was returning from the Jubilee in 1350, that the magistrates had ordered that no alterations should be made in the humble house where he was born. See *Sen.*, xiii., 3.

[2] Petrarch refers this journey to his *ninth* year in his *Letter to Posterity*.

knows than you. Hence I have felt free to recall these events, that you may keep in mind that I was born among perils and among perils have grown old, —if old I am, and there are not worse trials ahead. Although similar vicissitudes may be common to everyone entering this life, since existence is a warfare—nay more, a battle,—each nevertheless has his peculiar experiences, and the fighting differs greatly in kind. Each has his own burdens to bear, but it still makes a great difference what these burdens are.

Well then, to return to the matter in hand,—since amid the tempests of life I have never for long cast anchor in any one port, I have naturally made innumerable acquaintances. How many true friends I know not, for friends are not only exceedingly few, but difficult to distinguish. It has fallen to my lot, in consequence, to write to a great many who differed so widely from one another in mind and condition that on re-reading my letters it sometimes seemed to me as if I had said in one precisely the opposite from what I had in another. Yet anyone who has been in a similar position will readily admit that I was almost forced into such contradictions. The first care indeed in writing is to consider to whom the letter is to be sent; then we may judge what to say and how to say it. We address a strong man in one way and a weak one in another. The inexperienced youth and the old man who has fulfilled the duties of life, he who is puffed up with prosperity and he who is stricken with adversity, the scholar distinguished in literature and the man incapable of grasping anything beyond commonplace,

—each must be treated according to his character or position. There are infinite varieties among men; minds are no more alike than faces. And as the same stomach does not always relish the same kind of food, the same mind is not always to be fed upon the same kind of writing. So the task becomes a double one, for not only have we to consider the person to whom we propose to write, but how those things we are planning to say are likely to affect him when he reads them. Owing to these difficulties I have often been forced into apparent contradictions. And in order that unfavourable critics may not turn this against me, I have relied in a measure upon the kind aid of the flames for safety, and for the rest, upon your keeping the letters secret and suppressing my name.

But friends are lynx-eyed, and nothing is likely to escape them; so that if you cannot keep the letters from the few who still remain, be sure to urge them to destroy immediately any of my communications that they may possess, lest they be disturbed by any changes which I have made in the words or matter. These changes are due to the fact that, since it never occurred to me that you would ask or that I would consent to have the letters brought together in a single collection, I was accustomed, in order to avoid labour, to repeat now and then something I had said in a previous letter, using my own as my own, as Terence says. Now that letters sent off years ago to the most distant regions are brought together at once in a single place, it is easy to perceive deformities in the whole body which

were not apparent in the separate parts. Phrases which pleased when they occurred but once in a letter, begin to annoy one when frequently repeated in the same collection; accordingly they must be retained in one and expunged from the others. Many things, too, which related to every-day cares and which deserved mention when I wrote, would now weary even the most eager reader, and were therefore omitted. I recollect that Seneca laughed at Cicero for including trivial matters in his letters, and yet I am much more prone in my epistles to follow Cicero's example than Seneca's. Seneca, indeed, gathered into his letters pretty much all the moral reflections which he had published in his various books: Cicero, on the other hand, treats philosophical subjects in his books, but fills his letters with miscellaneous news and the gossip of the day. Let Seneca think as he likes about this; as for me, I must confess that I find Cicero's letters very agreeable reading. They relax the tension produced by weighty matters, which if long continued strains the mind, though if occasionally interrupted it becomes a source of pleasure.

I cannot sufficiently wonder at the boldness of Sidonius, although I may be a bit rash myself in denouncing this boldness when I do not very well understand his sarcasms, either because of my slow wit or his obscure style, or, as is not impossible, by reason of some error in the text. One thing, however, is clear; Cicero is ridiculed, and by a Sidonius![1] What liberty!—effrontery I would say, did I not

[1] Sidonius Apollinaris, a Christian writer of the fifth century, is

fear to exasperate those whom I have already offended by calling him bold. Here is one of the Latin people who finds it in his heart to attack Cicero. Nor does he speak of some single weakness, for if that were all I should have to ask pardon for both Seneca and myself; human frailty, indeed, can hardly escape criticism. But this Sidonius has dared to make sport of Cicero's eloquence,—his whole style and his method in general. This Arvernian[1] orator does not simply imagine himself, as he says, a brother of the Latin orator, which would be audacious enough, but he assumes the rôle of a rival, and, what is worse, of a scoffer. He would deprive him of the renown which all but a few of his contemporaries and fellow-citizens unanimously concede to him: even those few were doubtless warped in their judgment and goaded on by envy, the constant attendant upon contemporary

here the innocent victim of Petrarch's doubtless excusable ignorance. In speaking of his own letters Sidonius says that he has modestly refrained from attempting to imitate Cicero's style, and cites the fate of Titianus, who brought derision upon himself by so doing. Unless, as is quite possible, the text which Petrarch used was corrupt, it is difficult to explain how, even if, as he admits (see below p. 143), he had never heard of Fronto, the tutor of Marcus Aurelius, he could have so completely missed the point. The offending passage reads: "Nam de Marco Tullio silere me in stylo epistolari melius puto, quem nec Julius Titianus totum . . . digna similitudine expressit. Propter quod illum cæteri quique Frontonianorum [*i. e.*, admirers of Fronto], utpote consectaneum æmulati, cum veternorum dicendi genus imitaretur, oratorum simiam nuncupaverunt."—Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. lviii., pp. 444–5.

[1] Sidonius was born in Lyons; the epithet "arvernus" refers to his bishopric of Clermont, anciently called Arverni

fame. But neither time nor place afford any extenuation in the case of Sidonius. Consequently I wonder more and more what manner of person this was who thus attacked the undoubted prince of orators, although he was himself a disciple of oratory, and belonged to another age, and was born in another land. Upon turning the whole matter over in my mind, I find it impossible to accept in the case of so learned a man the excuse of ignorance, and to ascribe his perverted opinions to a weakness of the head rather than of the heart. I may be mistaken in this matter, as in many others, but if I am I rejoice that I am mistaken in company with many, and those by far the most distinguished, judges in believing that Cicero leaves all fault-finders far behind, and that to him belongs the palm for prose eloquence. From this point of view the moral and intellectual perversity of those who deny him pre-eminence becomes as clear as day.

Sidonius brings forward, it is true, a certain Julius Titianus and certain Frontoniani,[1] of whom I have never heard, as the authorities for his sarcasms. To these, and to all those holding such views, I make one and the same reply, namely, that Seneca was right when he said, "Whatever strength or advantage Roman eloquence may have to oppose to the arrogance of Greece was developed by Cicero." Moreover, Quintilian, among the many glorious things which he says of Cicero, well observes: "He was sent by the special gift of providence, with such

[1] See note above, p. 141.

extraordinary powers that in him eloquence might manifest all her resources." And after many proofs of this, he continues: "It was therefore but right that his contemporaries should declare with one accord that he reigned supreme in the courts. With succeeding generations it has come to pass that Cicero is no longer regarded as the name of a man, but of eloquence itself. To him, therefore, let us look, placing him before us as our model. When a student comes to admire Cicero greatly, he may know that he is making progress."[1] I hold moreover that, conversely, it is quite true that one to whom Cicero's style is displeasing either knows nothing of the highest eloquence or hates it.

Anxious as I was to hasten on, I could not pass over this calumny altogether. To return again to the letters, you will find many written in a familiar style to friends, including yourself; sometimes referring to matters of public or private interest, sometimes relating to bereavements, which form, alas! an ever recurring theme, or to other matters which circumstances brought into prominence. I have discussed almost nothing else, except as I have spoken of my state of mind, or have imparted some bit of news to my friends. I approve, you see, what Cicero says in his first letter to his brother, that it is the proper aim of a letter to inform the one to whom it is addressed of something of which he was ignorant. These considerations account for the title which I have selected. For, on thinking

[1] Quintilian's *Institutes*, bk. x., ch. i., §§ 109–112.

over the matter, although the simple rubric "epistles" was quite appropriate, I rejected it, both because many older writers had chosen it, and because I myself had applied it to the verses to my friends which I mentioned above,[1] and consequently disliked to resort to it a second time. So I chose a new name, and entitled the volume *Letters of Familiar Intercourse*,[2] letters, that is, in which there is little anxious regard to style, but where homely matters are treated in a homely manner. Sometimes, when it was not inappropriate, there may be a bit of simple narration or a few moral reflections, such as Cicero was accustomed to introduce into his letters.

To say so much about a small matter is justified by the fear of censorious critics, who, instead of producing work of their own to be judged, set themselves up as the judges of others' talents—a most audacious and impudent set, whose only safety lies in holding their tongues. Sitting upon the shore with folded hands, we are safe in expressing any opinions we please upon the art of navigation. By keeping the letters secret you will at least shield these crude productions, that I have carelessly thrown off, from such impudence. If ever I put the last touches to this work, I will send you, not a Phidian Minerva, as Cicero says, but an image, in some sort, of my mind and character, hewn out with great labour. When it reaches you, place it in some safe niche.

So far, so good. The next matter I would gladly

[1] *I. e.*, the metrical epistles.

[2] Familiarum rerum liber. See below, p. 153 *sqq.*

say nothing about, but a serious ailment is not easily concealed; its very symptoms betray it. I am ashamed of a life which has lapsed into weakness. As you will see, and as the order of the letters testifies, the language of my earlier years was sober and strong, betokening a valiant heart. I not only stood firm myself, but often consoled others. The succeeding letters become day by day weaker and more dispirited, nor have the lamentations with which they are filled a sufficiently manly tone. It is these that I would ask you to guard with special care. For what would others say to sentiments which I myself cannot re-read without a blush? Was I indeed a man in my youthful days, only to become a child when I reached maturity?

With a disingenuousness which I reprehend and deplore, I conceived the plan of changing the order of the letters, or concealing from you entirely those that I condemn. Neither subterfuge would have deceived you, since you possess the originals of these melancholy missives, and are aware of the year and day upon which each was written. Consequently I must arm myself with excuses. I have grown weary in the long and arduous battle. While courage and valour stood by me, I made a stand myself and encouraged others to resist; but when, by reason of the strength of the enemy and the fierceness of his onset, I began to lose my footing, and my spirits began to droop, that fine, bold tone promptly deserted me, and I descended to those weak laments which are so displeasing. My affection for my friends may perhaps extenuate my

offence, for while they remained unharmed I never groaned on account of any wound of fortune. But when almost all of them were hurried away in a single great catastrophe, nay when the whole world seemed about to perish,[1] it would have been inhuman, rather than courageous, to remain unmoved. Before that who ever heard me complain of exile, disease, litigation, elections, or the whirl of public affairs ?[2] Who ever heard a tearful regret for my father's house, for lost fortune, diminished fame, squandered money, or absent friends ? Cicero, however, shows such a want of manliness in the way he writes of such grievances that his sentiments often offend as much as his style delights me. Add to this his litigious epistles, and the complaints and insults which, with the utmost fickleness, he directs against distinguished men whom he himself has but just been lauding to the skies! On reading these I was so shocked and discomposed that I could not refrain in my irritation from writing to him and pointing out what offended me in his writings, as if he were a friend and contemporary.[3] Ignoring the space of time which separates us, I addressed him with a familiarity springing from my sympathy with his genius. This letter suggested others of the kind. For instance, on re-reading, after some years, Seneca's tragedy of *Octavia*,[4] I felt the same impulse to

[1] A reference to the plague of 1348 ; see above, pp. 113, 114.

[2] This list of woes seems to have been suggested by Cicero's experience rather than his own.

[3] See the letters to Cicero, given below, p. 239 *sqq*.

[4] Petrarch elsewhere expresses doubts whether Seneca really wrote

write to him, and later I wrote, on various themes, to Varro, Virgil, and others.[1] A few of these, which I have inserted in the latter part of this work, might produce the utmost astonishment in the mind of the reader, were he not forewarned. The rest I burned up in that general holocaust of which I told you above.

Just as Cicero was absorbed in his trials, so was I at one time in mine. But to-day—that you may know my present temper—it would not be inappropriate to attribute to me that serenity which comes, as Seneca says, even to the most untried, the serenity of despair itself. Why indeed fear, when one has so many times striven with death itself?

Una salus victis nullam sperare salutem.

You will see me work and speak with growing courage from day to day. If I should hit upon any subject worthy of my pen, the style itself will be more vigorous. Many themes will undoubtedly offer themselves. My writing and my life I foresee will come to an end together.

But while my other works are finished, or bid fair to be, these letters, which I began in an irregular fashion in my early youth, and am now bringing together in my old age and arranging in a volume,—this work the love of my friends will never permit me to finish, since I must conscientiously reply to their messages; nor can I ever persuade them to accept the

this tragedy which, it is now generally believed, is by another hand. See *Fam.*, xxiv., 5.

[1] See below, Part III., for examples of these letters.

oft-repeated excuse of my other occupations. When you shall learn that I have at last begged to be freed from that duty, and have brought this work to an end, then you may know that I am dead and freed from all life's burdens. In the meantime I shall continue to follow the path which I have entered upon, not looking for its end until darkness comes upon me. Pleasant work will take the place of repose with me. Moreover, having placed the weakest of my forces in the centre, as orators and generals are wont to do, I shall take care that, as I showed a solid front in beginning my book, so my rear-guard too shall not be wanting in courage. Indeed, I may make better head against the attacks and buffets of fortune, thanks to a gradual process of hardening which has gone on through life. In short, although I dare not assert how I shall demean myself in the stress of circumstances, I am firmly resolved not to succumb to any trial hereafter. "Beneath the crash of worlds undaunted he appears." You may picture me thus armed with the good thoughts of Virgil and Horace, which I used often to read and praise in my earlier years, and which, in my latter days of calamity, stern necessity has forced me to make my own.

My communion with you has been very pleasant, and I have, in my enjoyment, been led half unconsciously to prolong it. It brought back your face over land and sea, and kept you with me until evening. I took up my pen this morning, and the day and this letter are coming to an end together.

Well, this which I dedicate to you, my brother, is a fabric, so to speak, of many coloured threads.

But should I ever find a resting-place, and the leisure I have always sought in vain (and there is the promise of such a change), I intend to weave for you a more worthy and certainly more uniform web. I should be glad to think that I am among the few who can promise and confer fame; but you can lift yourself into the light without my aid, borne on the wings of your own genius. However, if I am able to rise, in spite of all the difficulties which beset me, you hereafter shall assuredly be my Idomeneus, my Atticus, and my Lucilius. Farewell.

The selection and copying of the letters, which Petrarch appears to have begun about 1359, when he was fifty-five years old, proved to be a trying task that dragged through five or six years. Writing to Boccaccio, in 1365, he describes a clever youth of Ravenna who had come to him two years before and, among other duties, had assisted him in editing the correspondence.[1] "My prose epistles to my friends,"[2] he says, "are very numerous; would that they were proportionately valuable! What with the confusion of the copies and the pressure of my other occupations I had almost despaired of editing them. Four friends had promised me their aid, but after a trial had left the task half done; yet this young man

[1] *Fam.*, xxiii., 19 (vol. iii., pp. 237, 238). [2] Familiares epistolæ.

has, quite by himself, completed the collection, which does not include all indeed, but as many of them as will go into a not too huge volume. Counting this one, they amount to three hundred and fifty,[1] which, if it please God, you shall sometime behold, written in his hand. You will not find the ill-defined though sumptuous penmanship affected by our copyists, or rather painters, of to-day, which delights us at a distance, but, as if invented for any other purpose than to be read, strains and tires the eyes when we look at it intently, thus belying the saying of the prince of grammarians that the word *letter* comes from *legere*, to read. This youth's characters are, on the contrary, compressed[2] and clear, carrying the eye with them, nor will you discover any faults of orthography or grammatical errors."

It is safe to infer that the additional labour involved in duplicating from the outset all his letters, so that he might retain copies of them, was not undertaken without the expectation of ultimately bringing them together into a collection for publication, like the correspondence

[1] There are but three hundred and forty-seven in the codices used by Fracassetti. See *Let. delle Cos. Fam.*, v., p. 110.

[2] *Castigata*, *i. e.*, without any flourishes such as disfigure the manuscripts of the period. See the facsimile of Petrarch's own clear handwriting, p. 238.

of Seneca and that of Abelard, with both of which he was familiar. (Of Cicero's letters he knew little if anything until he himself discovered a copy of part of them at Verona, in 1345, when he was already forty-one years old, too late for them to exercise any decisive influence upon the formation of his epistolary style.[1]) He had, moreover, long before the editing began, promised his friend "Socrates" that these prose epistles should be dedicated to him.[2] There can even be no doubt that individual letters were destined for a more or less wide circle of readers, as is shown by their careful composition and, here and there, by a naïve confession, as in the repetition for the benefit of others of the earlier part of the story of the goldsmith, with which the friend to whom he was writing was already familiar.[3] Indeed he closes his collection with an explicit appeal to the "candid reader, whoever thou art," exhorting him by their common love for the same studies not to allow himself to be disturbed by the confusion and unstudied language of the work, but to recall the excuses offered in the Preface.[4]

[1] The other great classical collections of letters, Pliny's, appears to have been unknown to Petrarch. See, further, p. 230 *sq.*

[2] See above, p. 134. [3] See below, p. 172.

[4] *Fam.*, xxiv., 13 (vol. iii., p. 307).

The entire prose correspondence of Petrarch falls into four divisions. The largest group, the one that he discusses in the Preface given above, embraces three hundred and forty-seven letters, which were written between the years 1332 and 1362.[1] To this collection, which filled the "not too huge volume," he decided to give the unassuming general title of *De Rebus Familiaribus*, by which he meant to imply that every-day topics were therein discussed with his friends, with no especial attention to style. He evidently wished to avoid any possible inference that he supposed that so miscellaneous and heterogeneous a mass of work could possess real literary form and merit. The title may fairly enough, if not literally, be translated *Letters of Friendly Intercourse.*

A second and much smaller collection was formed from those which could not be included in the main volume without unduly increasing its bulk.[2] About seventy of these have been re-discovered, and constitute the so-called *Miscellaneous Letters* (*Epistolæ Variæ*).

But the editing of this earlier correspondence did not bring the work to a close; the love of his friends admitted no conclusion to the task.

[1] One earlier letter (1326), and a half dozen written later, have found their way into this group. [2] *Fam.*, xxiv., 13 (vol. iii., p. 306).

"Their messages," he declares, "will still continue to come and I must continue to reply to them." Consequently a new division of the correspondence was formed, the important *Epistolæ de Rebus Senilibus*,—*Letters of Old Age*,—which were written during the last twelve years of the poet's life. A short dedication to "Simonides" (*i. e.*, Francesco Nelli) is prefixed to them.[1] There are one hundred and twenty-four in this group, some of them very long.

Lastly, there is a little group of about twenty letters, some of which contained such frank strictures upon the régime of the popes at Avignon that Petrarch found it expedient to put them by themselves and to suppress the names of those to whom they were addressed. These, the *Epistolæ sine Titulo*,[2] are so acrid in tone, and so unmeasured in the abuse which they heap upon the degraded churchmen, that their author has sometimes mistakenly been reckoned as a forerunner of the Reformation; but, as we shall see, he had no thought of questioning a single dogma of the Catholic Church.

[1] *Sen.*, i., 1, and iii., 1.

[2] In the Basle editions of the works, and in the editions of the letters published in 1601, some letters are included among the *Epistolæ sine Titulo* which apparently do not belong there.

Of the *Letters of Friendly Intercourse*, scarcely half appear in the most complete of the older printed editions,[1] but they have, not long since, been edited in full by Giuseppe Fracassetti, who includes no less than one hundred and twenty-eight never before printed. The *Epistolæ Variæ—Miscellaneous Letters*—are also to be found in his excellent edition.[2] The *Letters of Old Age* were early printed in their entirety, but unfortunately have not been reproduced since 1581. If one would read them in the original he must still turn to the miserable Basle editions of the works, which would almost appear to have been printed by persons unfamiliar with the rudiments of Latin, so numerous and incredible are the typographical errors which not only try the reader's temper but often entirely obscure the meaning.

How far Petrarch modified the original form of the letters in editing them is an important question, but one upon which we have but little information. He says in the Preface that the unworthy expedient occurred to him of suppressing such letters as exhibited his past

[1] Not more than one-third are to be found in the Basle editions of 1554 and 1581.

[2] *Francisci Petrarcæ Epistolæ de Rebus Familiaribus et Variæ*, studio et cura Josephi Fracassetti, Tom. iii., 8°, Florentiæ, 1859–63.

weakness, or so changing their order that he should at least appear in a more favourable light. But this, he decided, would be quite useless, since his friends possessed the properly dated originals. On the other hand, he certainly destroyed a large number of his papers. What canons he adopted in his selection we cannot determine, but obviously the temptation to exclude those which might seem to place him in a false position must have been almost irresistible. Moreover, he did not hesitate, as we have seen, in order to avoid repetition and monotony, to so alter the language that he felt it necessary to ask his friends, in some instances, to destroy their original copies lest they should be hurt by the changes he had made.

There seems to be no doubt that the *Letters of Friendly Intercourse* are arranged in the codices, and published by Fracassetti, in the order in which Petrarch first placed them. His intention was to observe chronological sequence, for he says explicitly that with the exception of the letters to dead authors, which he put together at the end of the volume, almost all the rest remained in the order in which they were written.[1] While this is true in general,

[1] *Fam.*, xxiv., 13 (vol. iii., p. 306).

there are many obvious exceptions. Unfortunately he did not ordinarily indicate the year, but only the day and the month upon which he wrote. It is very probable, therefore, that in arranging the letters years later he was often unable to determine just where a letter belonged. Fracassetti has devoted a great deal of attention to establishing the dates, where it is possible,[1] and has in this way done much to make the course of the poet's life clearer.

There is but one letter among those which have been preserved to which an earlier date than 1331 can be ascribed. The series begins, therefore, in Petrarch's twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth year. Some ninety of the letters were probably written before he was forty, but the great bulk of them belong to his later years. Almost one-half of those included in the various collections were composed after he had reached fifty.

It will naturally be asked if any of the replies called forth by Petrarch during toward half a century of indefatigable letter-writing have come down to us. A few only have been preserved. Recently a little volume containing thirty letters from his Florentine friend

[1] In the notes to his Italian version of the letters.

Francesco Nelli, has been published.[1] Besides these, there are four letters from Boccaccio,[2] one from Rienzo,[3] one from the Emperor Charles IV.,[4] three from Guglielmo di Pastrengo,[5] five from the enthusiastic young Humanist, Coluccio Salutati,[6] and perhaps a very few others. With these exceptions, Petrarch's correspondence includes only his own letters; and his friends often exist for us only in his kindly allusions to them. This is pre-eminently true of "Socrates" and "Lælius," to whom so many of the letters are addressed.

[1] *Lettres de Francesco Nelli à Pétrarque*, publiées par Henry Cochin, Paris, 1892.

[2] In *Le Lettere di Boccaccio*, edited by Corazzini, Florence, 1877.

[3] In the *Epistolario di Cola di Rienzo*, edited by Gabrielli, Rome, 1890.

[4] In Mehus's *Vita Ambrosii*, p. 191. Translated into Italian by Fracassetti, *Let. delle Cos. Fam.*, iv., 85 *sq.*

[5] These were formerly attributed to Petrarch, and are printed in the Venetian edition of his letters (1503). See Fracassetti, *Let. delle Cos. Fam.*, ii., 439 *sqq.*

[6] In the *Epistolarium de Coluccio Salutati*, edited by Novati, vol. i.

II

PETRARCH AND HIS LITERARY CONTEMPORARIES

Quotidie epistolas, quotidie carmina omnis in caput hoc nostri orbis angulus pluit ; . . . jam nec Gallis modo, sed Graiis et Teutonis et Britannis tempestatibus litterarum pulsor, omnium ingeniorum arbiter, mei ipsius ignarus.—*Fam.*, xiii., 7.

THE following letters have been selected with a view to illustrating Petrarch's attitude toward the Italian language and literature, his estimate of the other writers of his time, especially Dante and Boccaccio, and, in general, his literary ideals, and habits of work. An effort has been made to secure some continuity by the arrangement of the matter and the accompanying explanations, but any strictly logical presentation is precluded by the miscellaneous contents of the letters themselves. The reader is left, in most cases, to make his own deductions from Petrarch's words, but a brief excursus is added here and there, with the hope of emphasising some of the more important points.

The first two letters would indicate that there was a wide-spread interest in literature during the fourteenth century, and that Petrarch was looked upon as the highest tribunal before which the aspirant could lay his work. Few of his letters are more instructive or are written

in a lighter and more felicitous tone than the one which follows.

Petrarch's Passion for Work—The Trials of a Man of Letters

To the Abbot of St. Benigno[1]

Strangely enough I long to write, but do not know what or to whom. This inexorable passion has such a hold upon me that pen, ink, and paper, and work prolonged far into the night, are more to my liking than repose and sleep. In short, I find myself always in a sad and languishing state when I am not writing, and, anomalous though it seems, I labour when I rest, and find my rest in labour. My mind is hard as rock, and you might well think that it really sprang from one of Deucalion's stones. Let this tireless spirit pore eagerly over the parchment, until it has exhausted both fingers and eyes by the long strain, yet it feels neither heat nor cold, but would seem to be reclining upon the softest down. It is only fearful that it may be dragged away, and holds fast the mutinous members. Only when sheer necessity has compelled it to quit does it begin to flag. It takes a recess as a lazy ass takes his pack when he is ordered up a sharp hill, and comes back again to its task as a tired ass to his well-filled manger. My mind finds itself refreshed by prolonged exercise, as the beast of burden by his food

[1] *Fam.*, xiii., 7. This is the only letter that is preserved of Petrarch to this person.

and rest. What then am I to do, since I cannot stop writing, or bear even the thought of rest? I write to you, not because what I have to say touches you nearly, but because there is no one so accessible just now who is at the same time so eager for news, especially about me, and so intelligently interested in strange and mysterious phenomena, and ready to investigate them.

I have just told you something of my condition and of my indefatigable brain, but I will tell you now an incident which may surprise you even more, and will at the same time prove the truth of what I have said. It happened at a time when, after a long period of neglect, I had just taken up my *Africa* again, and that with an ardour like that of the African sun itself. This is the task which, if anything will help me, I trust may some time moderate or assuage my insatiable thirst for work. One of my very dearest friends, seeing that I was almost done for with my immoderate toil, suddenly asked me to grant him a very simple favour. Although I was unaware of the nature of his request, I could not refuse one who I knew would ask nothing except in the friendliest spirit. He thereupon demanded the key of my cabinet. I gave it to him, wondering what he would do, when he proceeded to gather together and lock up carefully all my books and writing materials. Then, turning away, he prescribed ten days of rest, and ordered me, in view of my promise, neither to read nor write during that time. I saw his trick; to him I now seemed to be resting, although in reality I felt as if I were bound

hand and foot. That day passed wearily, seeming as long as a year. The next day I had a headache from morning till night. The third day dawned and I began to feel the first signs of fever, when my friend returned, and seeing my plight gave me back the keys. I quickly recovered, and perceiving that I lived on work, as he expressed it, he never repeated his request.

Is it then true that this disease of writing, like other malignant disorders, is, as the Satirist claims, incurable, and, as I begin to fear, contagious as well? How many, do you reckon, have caught it from me? Within our memory, it was rare enough for people to write verses.[1] But now there is no one who does not write them; few indeed write anything else. Some think that the fault, so far as our contemporaries are concerned, is largely mine. I have heard this from many, but I solemnly declare, as I hope some time to be granted immunity from the other ills of the soul—for I look for none from this—that I am now at last suddenly awakened for the first time by warning signs to a consciousness that this may perhaps be true; while intent only upon my own welfare, I may have been unwittingly injuring, at the same time, myself and others. I fear that the reproaches of an aged father, who unexpectedly came to me, with a long face and almost in tears, may not be without foundation. "While I," he said, "have always honoured your name, see the return you make in compassing the ruin of my only son!" I stood for a time in embarrassed silence,

[1] *Hæc*, here used, we may safely infer, means verses.

for the age of the man and the expression of his face, which told of great sorrow, went to my heart. Then, recovering myself, I replied, as was quite true, that I was unacquainted either with him or his son. "What matters it," the old man answered, "whether you know him or not? He certainly knows you. I have spent a great deal in providing instruction for him in the civil law, but he declares that he wishes to follow in your footsteps. My fondest hopes have been disappointed, and I presume that he will never be either a lawyer or a poet." At this neither I nor the others present could refrain from laughter, and he went off none the better humoured. But now I recognise that this merriment was ill-timed, and that the poor old man deserved our consolation, for his complaints and his reproaches were not ungrounded. Our sons formerly employed themselves in preparing such papers as might be useful to themselves or their friends, relating to family affairs, business, or the wordy din of the courts. Now we are all engaged in the same occupation, and it is literally true, as Horace says, "learned or unlearned, we are all writing verses alike."

It is after all but a poor consolation to have companions in misery. I should prefer to be ill by myself. Now I am involved in others' ill-fortune as well as in my own, and am hardly given time to take breath. For every day letters and poems from every corner of our land come showering down upon my devoted head. Nor does this satisfy my foreign friends. I am overwhelmed by floods of missives, no longer from France alone, but from Greece,

from Germany, from England. I am unable to judge even my own work, and yet I am called upon to be the universal critic of others. Were I to answer the requests in detail, I should be the busiest of mortals. If I condemn the composition, I am a jealous carper at the good work of others; if I say a good word for the thing, it is attributed to a mendacious desire to be agreeable; if I keep silence altogether, it is because I am a rude, pert fellow. They are afraid, I infer, that my disease will not make way with me promptly enough. Between their goading and my own madness I shall doubtless gratify their wishes.

But all this would be nothing if, incredible as it may seem, this subtle poison had not just now begun to show its effects in the Roman Curia itself. What do you think the lawyers and doctors are up to? Justinian and Æsculapius have palled upon them. The sick and the litigious cry in vain for their help, for they are deafened by the thunder of Homer's and Virgil's names, and wander oblivious in the woody valleys of Cirrha, by the purling waters of the Aonian fountain. But it is hardly necessary to speak of these lesser prodigies. Even carpenters, fullers, and ploughmen leave the implements of their calling to talk of Apollo and the Muses. I cannot say how far the plague, which lately was confined to a few, has now spread.

If you would find an explanation for all this, you must recollect that although the delights of poetry are most exquisite, they can be fully understood only by the rarest geniuses, who are careless of

wealth and possess a marked contempt for the things of this world, and who are by nature especially endowed with a peculiar elevation and freedom of soul.[1] Consequently, as experience and the authority of the most learned writers agree, in no branch of art can mere industry and application accomplish so little. Hence—and you may find it comical although it disgusts me—all the poets are nowadays to be found on the street corner, and we can descry scarcely one on Helicon itself. They are all nibbling at the Pierian honeycomb, but no one can manage to digest it. How delightful indeed must this gift be to those who really possess it, when it can exercise such a fascination over sluggish minds, and in our vain and degenerate age can induce even the most avaricious to leave the pursuit of gain! On one thing, at least, our country may be congratulated: in spite of all the tares and sterile stalks which cumber the earth, some signs of true youthful genius are to be discovered. Some, if I am not misled by my hopes, will not drink in vain of the Castalian spring.—I felicitate thee, Mantua, beloved of the Muses, thee, Padua, thee, Verona, thee, Cimbria,[2] thee, Sulmo, and thee, Parthenope, home of Maro, when I see elsewhere the thirsty herd of upstart poetasters wandering drearily among uncertain byways!

It pricks my conscience that I should be responsi-

[1] *I. e.*, a soul able to free itself from the influence of the mere word and perceive the hidden allegorical meaning which to Petrarch was the essence of real poetry. See below, p. 233 *sqq*.

[2] This name is perhaps incorrect, owing to some error in the MSS. upon which Fracassetti based his edition.

ble in great part for fostering all these forms of literary madness, and should have misled others through my example,—by no means the least of offences. I fear lest those laurel leaves, which in my eagerness I tore prematurely from the branch, may in a way be answerable for the trouble. While, as many believe, they have been the means of bringing true dreams to me, they have caused in others a multitude of delusive visions, which were allowed to escape while all the world was asleep, through the ivory gates, into the autumnal air. But never mind, I suffer for my sins, for I am in a rage if I stay at home, and yet hardly dare nowadays to venture into the street. If I do, wild fellows rush up from every side and seize upon me, asking advice, giving me suggestions, disputing and fighting among themselves. They discover meanings in the poets of which the Mantuan shepherd, or the old blind man of Mœonia never dreamed. I become more and more irritated, and at last begin to fear that I may be dragged off before a magistrate for breaking the peace.

But how I am running on! I have spun a whole letter out of mere trifles. . . .[1] I have just arrived here,[2] and will await you as long as I possibly can. I know not whether it be that the air here renders the mind less susceptible to foreign impressions, or whether this "closed valley" does, as its name indicates, shut out alien preoccupations, but certain it is that, although I have from my earliest

[1] About a page is omitted here relating to some lucrative or honourable appointment which Petrarch's friends were anxious to obtain for him.

[2] *I. e.*, at Vaucluse.

manhood spent many years here, none of the inhabitants have yet become poets through contagious contact with me, with the sole exception of one of my farm-hands. Although advanced in years he, as Persius hath it, is beginning to dream on the two-peaked Parnassus. If the disease spreads I am undone. Shepherds, fishermen, hunters, ploughboys, —all would be carried away, even the cows would low in numbers and ruminate sonnets. Do not forget me. Farewell.

FOUNTAIN OF THE SORGUE.

The Visit to the Goldsmith at Bergamo

To Neri Morando[1]

Enough has been said of my own trifling experiences, and the story of the wound inflicted upon me by Cicero has reached an unconscionable length.[2] But I will add another incident to prove that Cicero is not the only one who enjoyed the affection of those who had never seen him. Although an old story to you, it may nevertheless arouse new interest when you hear it again.

From here I have always in sight a certain Alpine town, the Italian Pergamum,[3] to distinguish it from an Asiatic city of the same name, which, as you

[1] *Fam.*, xxi., 11. The events here narrated probably occurred in 1359.

[2] Petrarch had just finished one letter to Morando, in which he had told him of a wound received on the heel from a great copy of Cicero's works, which had fallen down and struck him.

[3] Bergamo.

know, was once the capital of Attalus, who bequeathed his possessions to Rome. In our Pergamum there lives a certain man, who, while he has but a slight knowledge of literature, possesses a good mind,—had he earlier applied himself to study. By profession he is a goldsmith, remarkably successful in the practice of his art; he enjoys moreover the best gift that nature can bestow, for he is an admirer and lover of all that is good and beautiful. The gold in which he works, and other forms of worldly wealth, appeal to him only in so far as they are means to higher ends. This old man, having heard of me by reputation, was immediately seized with a most ardent desire to win my friendship.

It would be a long story were I to recount all the devices he used in order to gratify this modest wish. By constant, courteous attentions and compliments to me and to those about me, he at last succeeded in his ardent efforts to bridge the chasm between us. While I had never seen him before, I knew his name and object, indeed his longing was plainly depicted in his face and expression. No one surely would have been so rude and surly as to refuse to see him under the circumstances. How could I have done otherwise? I was completely vanquished by the man's attractive countenance and his sincere and persistent attentions, and received him with hearty and unreserved good-will; indeed, it would have been inhuman to have rejected such proofs of genuine affection. His exultation and pride were at once obvious in every accent and gesture. He seemed to have reached the very summit

of his fondest hopes and to be metamorphosed by his joy.

He began long ago to spend no small part of his patrimony in my honour. In every corner of his house he placed the arms, name, and portrait of his new friend, whose face was even more deeply graven in his heart. Another portion of his wealth he devoted to procuring copies of anything of mine which he could get hold of, no matter what might be its character. I could not be very hard-hearted when it came to letting so enthusiastic and novel a collector have what I certainly would have denied a man of more consequence. He moreover gradually weaned himself from his previous life, habits, and interests, and so completely altered his whole former self as to be a source of utter astonishment to his friends.

In one matter, however, he refused to be guided by me, and, in spite of my opposition and frequent admonitions that he should not, at so late a day, exchange his customary vocations for a life of study, he finally left his shop and began to frequent the schools and cultivate teachers of the liberal arts. He took the greatest delight in his new life and was extremely sanguine as to the results. I cannot say how he actually got along, but he certainly merited the highest degree of success in his fond undertaking. No one could have shown greater ardour in a good cause, or more contempt for the less worthy objects of desire. He was at least equipped with a good mind and great enthusiasm, and could find plenty of teachers in his city. His age seemed to

be the only obstacle, although I well know that Plato took up the study of philosophy late in life, and Cato made no little progress in Greek literature when he was already an old man. Perhaps it is but right that this man should for this very reason find a niche in some of my works. So I will add that he is called Henry, his surname being Capra,[1] a most energetic and lively animal, fond of leaves and always climbing upwards. For these reasons Varro believes that the name is, by a transposition of letters, derived from this animal's tendency to *nibble* twigs, and certainly *carpa* and *capra* are not very unlike. If anyone ever deserved the name it is our friend, who, if he had got at the woods in the morning would have returned with a full paunch and plenty of milk. All this you yourself have heard often enough, but I tell it for the benefit of others.[2] The rest of my story you do not yet know.

This fellow, whose character and devotion to me I have so carefully portrayed, had long been urging me to honour him and his lares with a visit, and by a sojourn of at least a single day to render him, as he put it, happy and renowned to all future generations. I continued, however, not without difficulty, to postpone his desire for several years. But at last, influenced by the nearness of the place, and over-

[1] Namely, she-goat.

[2] . . . sed noscenda aliis dicta sint. Petrarch always wished his letters to be complete even at the risk of repetition. We have here a frank confession that he was not writing for the benefit of the friend alone to whom the letter was addressed. Fracassetti has perversely translated this passage, *odi adesso quel che ancora non sai.*

come not only by prayers but by objurations and tears, I consented to accompany him, in spite of the objections of my more haughty friends, to whom he seemed unworthy of the honour.

I reached Bergamo on the evening of October thirteenth. My host had accompanied me the whole of the way, and, in constant fear lest I might perhaps change my mind, he and those with him exerted all their powers of invention to discover topics of conversation which might make the way less wearisome. Thus we traversed a short and easy road without fatigue. A few gentlemen had accompanied me with the special purpose of finding out what this enthusiastic person might have in store.

Well, when we approached the town I was cordially received by friends who had come out to meet me. They, with the Podestà, the Captain of the People, and other local magistrates, vied with each other in urging me to put up at the palazzo or at some gentleman's house. All this time my poor goldsmith was trembling for fear I might give in to such insistence. But I did what I believed to be proper under the circumstances, and alighted with my companions at the house of my more humble friend. There I was received with great pomp, and sat down to a kingly banquet rather than to the good cheer of an artisan or philosopher. My couch of purple was spread in a room glittering with gold, where, as my host swore by all that was holy, no one else had ever slept or ever would sleep. The books I found were not technical, but such as would be

dear to a student and a lover of good literature. Here I passed the night. Certainly no one ever enjoyed the hospitality of so delighted a host. In fact his delight was so great that his friends began to fear for his sanity, or lest, as has happened to not a few, he should actually die of joy.

The next day I departed, loaded with honours and surrounded by a great crowd. The Podestà and many others whose society I did not care for accompanied me much farther on my way than was agreeable. It was late before I had finally shaken off my fervid host and was again at my country place.

You have now heard, good Neri, what I had in mind to tell you, and this nocturnal epistle must come to an end,—for my anxiety to get my letter done has kept me writing straight on until nearly dawn. I am weary now and the morning quiet invites me to enjoy the best part of the night for slumber. Farewell, remember your friend.

Written with a rural pen, just before light, on October 15.

The three following letters furnish a very clear expression of Petrarch's feelings towards the Italian language and his great collaborators in its formation, Dante and Boccaccio.

Grieved by a certain indifference which his friend exhibited towards Dante, Boccaccio, soon after his return from a visit to Petrarch, sent

him a copy of the *Divine Comedy*.[1] Accompanying the volume was a Latin poem, in which he requested that Petrarch read the work of his distinguished fellow-citizen and place it among his other books.[2]

The letter that Petrarch wrote in acknowledgment of the gift is one of the most important in his correspondence. Strangely enough, there are but two in all the vast collection of prose letters in which he makes any allusions to Dante, and then never by name. In one of his lesser works he narrates one or two anecdotes of Dante's brusqueness towards the despots whose hospitality he enjoyed.[3] It is neverthe-

[1] A MS. of the *Divine Comedy* in the Vatican has, it would appear, been at last satisfactorily proven to be the very one which Boccaccio sent. See Pakscher's scholarly paper in *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, vol. x., p. 226 *sqq*. De Nolhac has reached the same conclusion ; *cf. La Bibliothèque de Fulvio Orsini*, p. 304.

[2] The little poem closes with the lines :

" Hunc oro, mi care nimis spesque unica nostrûm,
. . . . . .
Concivem doctumque satis pariterque poetam
Suscipe, junge tuis, lauda, cole, perlege. Nam si
Feceris hoc, magnis, et te decorabis et illum
Laudibus, O nostræ eximium decus urbis et orbis."

Corazzini, *Le Lettere di Boccaccio*, p. 54. Also in Fracassetti's *Let. delle Cos. Fam.*, iv., pp. 399, 400.

[3] " Rerum Memorandum," *Opera*, p. 427. The misprints in the Basle editions give the anecdotes an ill-natured turn which Petrarch did not intend. The opening of the passage should read : *Dante Alagherius et ipse concivus nuper meus, vir vulgari eloquio clarissimus fuit sed moribus parumper contumacior* [the Basle editions have *parum per contumaciam*] *et oratione liberior quam delicatis et fastid-*

less probably unfair to accuse Petrarch of jealousy. In the first place, the assumption that he had never read the *Divine Comedy* is hardly justifiable. It is true that he did not possess a copy of the work, and that Boccaccio urged him to read and cherish it. But he must assuredly have been acquainted with the writings of an author whom he declared to be without question the greatest master of the vernacular. The reader can, however, reach his own conclusions, as all the data which we have are given below. He should remember that Petrarch was placed in a trying position. It is impossible to appear wholly unconstrained and natural when one is meeting the charge of jealousy towards a popular contemporary. Then, a scholar or an author may not be completely or enthusiastically in sympathy with some of his fellow-workers to whom he would nevertheless accord a very high rank. We may safely infer that Petrarch was not drawn towards Dante, although he frankly acknowledged his greatness. The two men had much in common, their Christian humanism for example,[1] but Dante's

iosis ætatis nostræ principum auribus atque oculis acceptum fuit, etc. See Hortis, *Studi sulle Opere Latine del Boccaccio*, Trieste, 1879, p. 303.

[1] See the close of the fourth canto of the "Inferno," and especially the *Convito*, iv., ch. 4.

devotion to mediæval theology and science must have repelled the younger poet, whose studies were exclusively literary, including perhaps moral philosophy and history, but utterly foreign to the lucubrations of Peter Lombard or Thomas Aquinas. An able Italian critic[1] has suggested that we may find an analogy between Petrarch's attitude toward Dante, and that of Erasmus toward Luther, or Voltaire' s toward Rousseau. Once, when but eight years old, he had seen the dark, emaciated poet of the Ghibellines. The harsh manner and the haughty profile of the man may, as Carducci says, have impressed the rosy youngster with fear and created a feeling of dislike which he did not entirely outgrow.

The second letter to Boccaccio upon the Italian poets was written some five years after the one of which we have been speaking, and a difference in the tone of the references to Dante is perhaps perceptible. The *Trionfi*, the latest of Petrarch's Italian poems, somewhat resemble in style the *Divine Comedy*, and were perhaps written partly with the aim of showing that he could rise to the same high strain.

Petrarch entertained much less regard for the vulgar tongue than Dante and Boccaccio,

[1] Carducci, *Studi Letterari*, 2d ed., p. 334.

because more completely engrossed by the strength of the Latin. To him "prose and verse," as we shall see, meant compositions in Latin, which was alone adapted to the highest purposes of expression. From his scornful treatment of the Italian language the reader will naturally turn to the first book of Dante's *Convito*,[1] or to his little treatise, *The Vernacular* (*De Vulgari Eloquio*), where the advantages and weaknesses of the mother tongue are sympathetically discussed.

Petrarch Disclaims all Jealousy of Dante

To Boccaccio[2]

There are many things in your letter which do not require any answer; those, for example, which we have lately settled face to face. Two points there were, however, which it seemed to me should not be passed over in silence, and I will briefly write down such reflections concerning them as may occur to me. In the first place, you excuse yourself with some heat for seeming to praise unduly a certain poet, a fellow-citizen of ours, who in point of style is very popular, and who has certainly chosen a noble theme. You beg my pardon for this, as if I regarded anything said in his, or anyone else's praise, as detracting from my own. You assert, for

[1] The best edition is that of Dr. Moore (Clarendon Press, Oxford).
[2] *Fam.*, xxi., 15 (probably written in 1359).

instance, that if I will only look closely at what you say of him, I shall find that it all reflects glory upon me. You take pains to explain, in extenuation of your favourable attitude towards him, that he was your first light and guide in your early studies. Your praise is certainly only a just and dutiful acknowledgment of his services, an expression of what I may call filial piety. If we owe all to those who begot and brought us forth, and much to those who are the authors of our fortunes, what shall we say of our debt to the parents and fashioners of our minds? How much more, indeed, is due to those who refine the mind than to those who tend the body, he will perceive who assigns to each its just value; for the one, it will be seen, is an immortal gift, the other, corruptible and destined to pass away.

Continue, then, not by my sufferance simply, but with my approbation, to extol and cherish this poet, the guiding star of your intellect, who has afforded you courage and light in the arduous way by which you are pressing stoutly on towards a most glorious goal. He has long been buffeted and wearied by the windy plaudits of the multitude. Honour him now and exalt him by sincere praise worthy alike of you and of him, and, you may be sure, not unpleasing to me. He is worthy of such a herald, while you, as you say, are the natural one to assume the office. I therefore accept your song of praise with all my heart, and join with you in extolling the poet you celebrate therein.[1]

[1] This refers to the poem, spoken of above, with which Boccaccio accompanied his copy of Dante.

Hence there was nothing in your letter of explanation to disturb me except the discovery that I am still so ill understood by you who, as I firmly believed, knew me thoroughly. You think, then, that I do not take pleasure in the praises of illustrious men and glory in them? Believe me, nothing is more foreign to me than jealousy; there is no scourge of which I know less. On the contrary, in order that you may see how far I am from such feelings, I call upon Him before whom all hearts are open to witness that few things in life have caused me more pain than to see the meritorious passed by, utterly without recognition or reward. Not that I am deploring my own lot, or looking for personal gain; I am mourning the common fate of mankind, as I behold the reward of the nobler arts falling to the meaner. I am not unaware that although the reputation which attaches to right conduct may stimulate the mind to deserve it, true virtue is, as the philosophers say, a stimulus to itself; it is its own reward, its own guide, its own end and aim. Nevertheless, now that you have yourself suggested a theme which I should not voluntarily have chosen, I shall proceed to refute for you, and through you for others, the commonly accepted notion of my judgment of this poet. It is not only false, as Quintilian says of the construction put upon his criticism of Seneca,[1] but it is insidious and, with many, out-and-

[1] Quintilian's strictures on Seneca's style had given rise to the opinion that he not only disapproved of Seneca's works, but hated him personally. He refutes (*Institutes*, x., 1) that "vulgatam falso de me opinionem, qua damnare eum [sc. Senecam] et invisum quoque

out malevolent. My enemies say that I hate and despise him, and in this way stir up the common herd against me, for with them he is extremely popular. This is indeed a novel kind of perversity, and shows a marvellous aptitude for harming others. But truth herself shall defend me.

In the first place, there can be no possible cause for ill-will towards a man whom I never saw but once, and that in my very earliest childhood. He lived with my grandfather and my father,[1] being younger than the former, but older than my father, with whom, on the same day and by the same civil commotion, he was driven from his country into exile. At such a time strong friendships are often formed between companions in misery. This proved especially true of these two men, since in their case not only a similar fate but a community of taste and a love for the same studies, served to bring them together. My father, however, forced by other cares and by regard for his family, succumbed to the natural influences of exile, while his friend resisted, throwing himself, indeed, with even greater ardour into what he had undertaken, neglecting everything else and desirous alone of future fame.

habere sum creditus." This naturally seemed to Petrarch a very exact analogy to the charges of jealousy brought against him.

[1] Cum avo patreque meo vixit. The reader is left to conjecture how intimate Dante and Petracco may have been when they lived together in Florence. Petrarch, in a reference to his father in *Sen.*, x., 2, would lead us to infer that he was born about 1252, twelve or thirteen years before Dante. There seems to be no means of deciding whether that statement or the one given in this letter, which makes Dante the older, is nearer the truth.

In this I can scarce admire and praise him enough, —that neither the injustice of his fellow-citizens, nor exile, nor poverty, nor the attacks of his enemies, neither the love of wife, nor solicitude for his children, could divert him from the path he had once decided upon, when so many who are highly endowed are yet so weak of purpose that they are swerved from their course by the least disturbance. And this most often happens to writers of verse, for silence and quiet are especially requisite for those who have to care not only for the thought and the words but the felicitous turn as well. Thus you will see that my supposed hate for this poet, which has been trumped up by I know not whom, is an odious and ridiculous invention, since there is absolutely no reason for such repugnance, but, on the contrary, every reason for partiality, on account of our common country, his friendship with my father, his genius, and his style, the best of its kind, which must always raise him far above contempt.

This brings us to the second reproach cast upon me, which is based upon the fact that, although in my early years I was very eager in my search for books of all kinds, I never possessed a copy of this poet's work, which would naturally have attracted me most at that age. While exceedingly anxious to obtain other books which I had little hope of finding, I showed a strange indifference, quite foreign to me, towards this one, although it was readily procurable. The fact I admit, but I deny the motives which are urged by my enemies. At that time I too was devoting my powers to compositions in the

vernacular; I was convinced that nothing could be finer, and had not yet learned to look higher. I feared, however, in view of the impressionableness of youth and its readiness to admire everything, that, if I should imbue myself with his or any other writer's verses, I might perhaps unconsciously and against my will come to be an imitator. In the ardour of youth this thought filled me with aversion. Such was my self-confidence and enthusiasm that I deemed my own powers quite sufficient, without any mortal aid, to produce an original style all my own, in the species of production upon which I was engaged. It is for others to judge whether I was right in this. But I must add that if anything should be discovered in my Italian writings resembling, or even identical with, what has been said by him or others, it cannot be attributed to secret or conscious imitation. This rock I have always endeavoured to avoid, especially in my writings in the vernacular, although it is possible that, either by accident or, as Cicero says, owing to similar ways of thinking, I may ignorantly have traversed the same path as others.[1] If you ever believe me, believe me now; accept this as the real explanation of my conduct. Nothing can be more strictly true; and if my modesty and sense of propriety did not seem to you sufficient to vouch for this, my youthful pride at any rate certainly might have explained it.

To-day, however, I have left these anxieties far

[1] This matter of plagiarism is a subject to which Petrarch often reverts in his letters. He realised the difficulty of producing anything essentially new after the great works of classical antiquity.

behind, and, having done so, I am freed from my former apprehension, and can now unreservedly admire other writers, him above all. At that time I was submitting work of my own to the verdict of others, whereas now I am merely passing my own silent verdicts upon my fellows. I find that my opinion varies as regards all the rest, but in his case there can be no room for doubt; without hesitation I yield him the palm for skill in the use of the vulgar tongue. They lie, then, who assert that I carp at his renown; I, who probably understand better than the majority of these foolish and immoderate admirers of his what it is that merely tickles their ears, without their knowing why, but cannot penetrate their thick heads, because the avenues of intelligence are obstructed. They belong to the same class that Cicero brands in his *Rhetoric*, who "read fine orations or beautiful poems, and praise the orators or poets, and yet do not know what it is that has aroused their admiration, for they lack the ability to see where the thing is that most pleases them, or what it is, or how it is produced." If this happens with Demosthenes and Cicero, Homer and Virgil, among learned men and in the schools, how will it fare with our poet among the rude fellows who frequent the taverns and public squares?

As for me, far from scorning his work, I admire and love him, and in justice to myself I may venture to add that if he had been permitted to live until this time he would have found few friends more devoted to him than myself, provided, of course, that I had found his character as attractive as his genius. On the other hand, there are none to

whom he would have been more obnoxious than these same silly admirers, who, in general, know equally little about what they praise and what they condemn, and who so mispronounce and lacerate his verses that they do him the greatest injury that a poet can suffer. I might even strive to the best of my powers to rescue him from this abuse, did not my own productions give me enough to think about. As it is, I can only give voice to my irritation, when I hear the common herd befouling with their stupid mouths the noble beauty of his lines.

Just here it may not be out of place to say that this was not the least of the considerations which led me to give up a style of composition to which I devoted myself in my early years. I feared for my writings the same fate which I had seen overtake those of others, especially those of the poet of whom we are speaking. I could not in my own case look for more musical tongues or more flexible minds among the common people than I noted in the rendering of those authors whom long favour and habit have made popular in the theatres and public squares. That my apprehensions were not idle is clear from the fact that I am continually tortured by the tongues of the people, as they sing the few productions which I allowed to escape me in my youth. I indignantly reject and hate what I once loved; and day by day walk the streets with vexation and execrate my own talents. Everywhere a crowd of ignorant fellows, everywhere I find my Damœtas ready at the street corner "to murder with his screeching reed" my poor song.

However, I have already said more than enough concerning a trifling matter which I ought not to have taken so seriously, for this hour, which will never return, should have been devoted to other things. And yet your excuse did seem to me to have just a little in common with the accusations of these critics, some of whom are constantly asserting that I hate, some that I despise, this person,—whose name I have intentionally refrained to-day from mentioning, lest the mob, who catch up everything without understanding it, should cry out that I was defaming it. Others again claim that I am actuated by envy;—men who are jealous of me and my fame; for, although I scarcely am an object for envy, I yet have noticed late in life that there are those who entertain this feeling towards me, a thing that at one time I could not have believed possible. In answer to this charge of envy brought against me, I might reply that, many years ago, in the ardour of youth, and with an approving conscience, I ventured to assert, not in any ordinary manner, but in a poem addressed to a certain illustrious personage, that I envied no man.[1] Suppose, though, that I am not worthy of belief. Still, even then, what probability is there that I should be jealous of a writer who devoted his whole life to those things

[1] This is probably a reference, as M. Develay suggests, to a metrical epistle addressed to Giacomo Colonna, the Bishop of Lombez, in which the following lines occur:

Nil usquam invideo, nullum ferventius odi,
Nullum despicio nisi me. . . .

which with me were but the flower and first-fruits of my youth. What to him was, if not his only occupation, certainly the supreme object of his life, to me was mere sport, a pastime, the first essay of my powers.[1]

What occasion is there here for rancour? What ground is there for even a suspicion of jealousy? When you say, in praising him, that he might have devoted himself to another kind of composition, had he wished, I heartily agree with you. I have the highest opinion of his ability, for it is obvious from what he has done that he would have succeeded in anything he might have chosen to undertake. But suppose that he had turned his powers in another direction, and successfully — what then? What would there be in that to make me jealous? Why should it not rather be a source of satisfaction to me? Who indeed could excite envy in me, who do not envy even Virgil?—unless perhaps I should be jealous of the hoarse applause which our poet enjoys from the tavern-keepers, fullers, butchers, and others of that class, who dishonour those whom they would praise. But, far from desiring such popular recognition, I congratulate myself, on the contrary, that, along with Virgil and Homer, I am free from it, inasmuch as I fully realise how little the plaudits of the unschooled multitude weigh with scholars. Should it be suggested that the citizen of Mantua is, when all is said, dearer to me than my fellow-citizen of Florence, I must urge that, although I will

[1] Namely, literary productions in the Italian tongue.

not deny that jealousy does flourish most rankly between neighbours, the mere fact of common origin cannot by itself justify such an inference. Indeed the simple fact of our belonging to different generations would make this latter supposition absurd, for as one has elegantly said, who never speaks otherwise than elegantly, "The dead are neither hated nor envied."

You will accept my solemn affirmation that I delight in both the thought and style of our poet, nor do I ever refer to him except with the greatest admiration. It is true that I have sometimes said to those who wished to know precisely what I thought, that his style was unequal, for he rises to a higher plane of excellence in the vernacular than in poetry and prose.[1] But you will not deny this, nor will it, if rightly understood, carry with it any disparagement of his fame and glory. Who, indeed—I will not say at the present time, when eloquence has so long been mourned as dead, but at the time when it flourished most—who, I say, ever excelled in all its various branches? Witness Seneca's *Declamations!*[2] No one dreams of attributing inexhaustible versatility even to Cicero, Virgil, Sallust, or Plato. Who would lay claim to a degree of praise which

[1] Quod in vulgari eloquio, quam in carminibus aut prosa clarior atque altior assurgit. The literal form is retained in the rendering above, as Petrarch's very language is significant of his contempt for the Italian. Prose and verse could only be Latin.

[2] The work here referred to, which Petrarch supposed to be an inferior production of Seneca the Philosopher, is now attributed to his father, the Rhetor, of whose existence Petrarch was unaware.

must be denied even to such genius? It is enough to have excelled in one kind of composition. This being true, let those be silent who attempt to twist my words into calumnies, and let those who have believed my calumniators read here, if they will, my opinion of them.

Having disposed thus of one matter which has been troubling me, I come now to a second. You thank me for my solicitude for your health. While you do this from courtesy, and in accordance with conventional usage, you well know that such acknowledgment is quite unnecessary. For who is ever thanked for his interest in himself, or his own affairs? and you, dear friend, are part and parcel of myself.

Although, next to virtue, friendship is the most sacred, the most God-like and divine thing in human intercourse, yet I think that it makes a difference whether one begins by loving or by being loved, and that those friendships should be more carefully fostered where we return love for love than where we simply receive it. I have been overwhelmed in a thousand instances by your kindness and friendly offices, but among them all there is one that I can never forget.

In days gone by, I was hurrying across central Italy in mid-winter; you hastened to greet me, not only with affectionate longings, which are the wings of the soul, but in person, impelled by a wondrous desire to behold one whom you had never yet seen,[1] but whom you were nevertheless resolved to love.

[1] This would seem sufficient proof that Petrarch and Boccaccio first met on this occasion of Petrarch's visit to Florence.

You had sent before you a piece of beautiful verse, thus showing me first the aspect of your genius, and then of your person. It was evening, and the light was fading, when, returning from my long exile,[1] I found myself at last within my native walls. You welcomed me with a courtesy and respect greater than I merited, recalling the poetic meeting of Anchises and the King of Arcadia, who, "in the ardour of youth, longed to speak with the hero and to press his hand."[2] Although I did not, like him, stand "above all others," but rather beneath, your zeal was none the less ardent. You introduced me, not within the walls of Pheneus, but into the sacred penetralia of your friendship. Nor did I present you with "a superb quiver and arrows of Lycia," but rather with my sincere and unchangeable affection. While acknowledging my inferiority in many respects, I will never willingly concede it in this, either to Nisus, or to Pythias, or to Lælius. Farewell.

[1] Petrarch had never been in Florence before, although reckoned as a Florentine. He uses here the phrase *longo postliminio redeuntem*,—referring to the right in the Roman law to return home and resume one's former rank and privileges—a reminiscence possibly of the law school.

[2] *Cf.* the *Æneid*, viii., 162 *sqq.*, for this and the succeeding allusions.

The Story of Griselda

To Boccaccio[1]

Your book, written in our mother tongue and published, I presume, during your early years, has fallen into my hands, I know not whence or how. If I told you that I had read it, I should deceive you. It is a very big volume, written in prose and for the multitude. I have been, moreover, occupied with more serious business, and much pressed for time. You can easily imagine the unrest caused by the warlike stir about me, for, far as I have been from actual participation in the disturbances, I could not but be affected by the critical condition of the state. What I did was to run through your book, like a traveller who, while hastening forward, looks about him here and there, without pausing. I have heard somewhere that your volume was attacked by the teeth of certain hounds, but that you defended it valiantly with staff and voice. This did not surprise me, for not only do I well know your ability, but I have learned from experience of the existence of an insolent and cowardly class who attack in the work of others everything which they do not happen to fancy or be familiar with, or which they cannot themselves accomplish. Their insight and capabilities extend no farther; on all other themes they are silent.

[1] This letter, written in 1373 and containing a Latin translation of Boccaccio's story of Griselda, is printed as a separate work in the *Opera* (1581), p. 540 *sqq.*, but appears as *Sen.*, xvii., 3, in Fracassetti's Italian version.

My hasty perusal afforded me much pleasure. If the humour is a little too free at times, this may be excused in view of the age at which you wrote, the style and language which you employ, and the frivolity of the subjects, and of the persons who are likely to read such tales. It is important to know for whom we are writing, and a difference in the character of one's listeners justifies a difference in style. Along with much that was light and amusing, I discovered some serious and edifying things as well, but I can pass no definite judgment upon them, since I have not examined the work thoroughly.

As usual, when one looks hastily through a book, I read somewhat more carefully at the beginning and at the end. At the beginning you have, it seems to me, accurately described and eloquently lamented the condition of our country during that siege of pestilence which forms so dark and melancholy a period in our century. At the close you have placed a story which differs entirely from most that precede it, and which so delighted and fascinated me that, in spite of cares which made me almost oblivious of myself, I was seized with a desire to learn it by heart, so that I might have the pleasure of recalling it for my own benefit, and of relating it to my friends in conversation. When an opportunity for telling it offered itself shortly after, I found that my auditors were delighted. Later it suddenly occurred to me that others, perhaps, who were unacquainted with our tongue, might be pleased with so charming a story, as it had delighted me ever since

I first heard it some years ago, and as you had not considered it unworthy of presentation in the mother tongue, and had placed it, moreover, at the end of your book, where, according to the principles of rhetoric, the most effective part of the composition belongs. So one fine day when, as usual, my mind was distracted by a variety of occupations, discontented with myself and my surroundings, I suddenly sent everything flying, and, snatching my pen, I attacked this story of yours. I sincerely trust that it will gratify you that I have of my own free-will undertaken to translate your work, something I should certainly never think of doing for anyone else, but which I was induced to do in this instance by my partiality for you and for the story. Not neglecting the precept of Horace in his *Art of Poetry*, that the careful translator should not attempt to render word for word, I have told your tale in my own language, in some places changing or even adding a few words, for I felt that you would not only permit, but would approve, such alterations.[1]

Although many have admired and wished for my version, it seemed to me fitting that your work should be dedicated to you rather than to anyone else; and it is for you to judge whether I have, by this change of dress, injured or embellished the original. The story returns whence it came; it knows its judge, its home, and the way thither. As you and everyone who reads this knows, it is you

[1] The additions are so considerable that Fracassetti, in translating this letter into Italian, could make use of the words of Boccaccio's original in scarcely more than half of the tale.

and not I who must render account for what is essentially yours. If anyone asks me whether this is all true, whether it is a history or a story, I reply in the words of Sallust, " I refer you to the author "— to wit, my friend Giovanni. With so much of introduction I begin. . . .[2]

My object in thus re-writing your tale was not to induce the women of our time to imitate the patience of this wife, which seems to me almost beyond imitation, but to lead my readers to emulate the example of feminine constancy, and to submit themselves to God with the same courage as did this woman to her husband. Although, as the Apostle James tells us, " God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man," he still may prove us, and often permits us to be beset with many and grievous trials, not that he may know our character, which he knew before we were created, but in order that our weakness should be made plain to ourselves by obvious and familiar proofs. Anyone, it seems to me, amply deserves to be reckoned among the heroes of mankind who suffers without a murmur for God, what this poor peasant woman bore for her mortal husband.

My affection for you has induced me to write at an advanced age what I should hardly have undertaken even as a young man. Whether what I have narrated be true or false I do not know, but the fact that you wrote it would seem sufficient to justify the inference that it is but a tale. Foreseeing this

[2] Petrarch's version of the tale is here omitted.

question, I have prefaced my translation with the statement that the responsibility for the story rests with the author; that is, with you. And now let me tell you my experiences with this narrative, or tale, as I prefer to call it.

In the first place, I gave it to one of our mutual friends in Padua to read, a man of excellent parts and wide attainments. When scarcely half-way through the composition, he was suddenly arrested by a burst of tears. When again, after a short pause, he made a manful attempt to continue, he was again interrupted by a sob. He then realised that he could go no farther himself, and handed the story to one of his companions, a man of education, to finish. How others may view this occurrence I cannot, of course, say; for myself, I put a most favourable construction upon it, believing that I recognise the indications of a most compassionate disposition; a more kindly nature, indeed, I never remember to have met. As I saw him weep as he read, the words of the Satirist came back to me:

> "Nature, who gave us tears, by that alone
> Proclaims she made the feeling heart our own;
> And 't is our noblest sense."[1]

Some time after, another friend of ours, from Verona (for all is common between us, even our friends), having heard of the effect produced by the story in the first instance, wished to read it for himself. I readily complied, as he was not only a good friend, but a man of ability. He read the narrative

[1] Juvenal, xv., 131–3, as translated by William Gifford.

from beginning to end without stopping once. Neither his face nor his voice betrayed the least emotion, not a tear or a sob escaped him. "I too," he said at the end, "would have wept, for the subject certainly excites pity, and the style is well adapted to call forth tears, and I am not hard-hearted; but I believed, and still believe, that this is all an invention. If it were true, what woman, whether of Rome or any other nation, could be compared with this Griselda? Where do we find the equal of this conjugal devotion, where such faith, such extraordinary patience and constancy?" I made no reply to this reasoning, for I did not wish to run the risk of a bitter debate in the midst of our good-humoured and friendly discussion. But I had a reply ready. There are some who think that whatever is difficult for them must be impossible for others; they must measure others by themselves, in order to maintain their superiority. Yet there have been many, and there may still be many, to whom acts are easy which are commonly held to be impossible. Who is there who would not, for example, regard a Curtius, a Mucius, or the Decii, among our own people, as pure fictions; or, among foreign nations, Codrus and the Philæni; or, since we are speaking of woman, Portia, or Hypsicratia, or Alcestis, and others like them? But these are actual historical persons. And indeed I do not see why one who can face death for another, should not be capable of encountering any trial or form of suffering. . . .[1]

[1] The close of this letter is given above, pp. 53 *sqq.*

On the Italian Language and Literature

To Boccaccio[1]

"I have somewhat to say unto thee," if a poor sinner may use the words of his Saviour, and this something for which you are listening, what should it be but what I am wont to tell you? So prepare your mind for patience and your ears for reproaches. For, although nothing could be more alike than our two minds, I have often noticed with surprise that nothing could be more unlike than our acts and resolutions. I frequently ask myself how this happens, not only in your case but in that of certain others of my friends, in whom I note the same contrast. I find no other explanation than that our common mother, nature, made us the same, but that habit, which is said to be a second nature, has rendered us unlike. Would that we might have lived together, for then we should have been but one mind in two bodies.

You may imagine now that I have something really important to tell you, but you are mistaken;—and, as you well know, a thing must be trivial indeed which the author himself declares to be unimportant, for our own utterances are so dear to us that scarcely anyone is a good judge of his own performances, so prone are we to be misled by partiality for ourselves and our works. You, among many thousands, are the only one to be betrayed into a false estimate of your compositions by aversion and con-

[1] *Sen.*, v., 3. Written, Fracassetti believes, about 1366.

tempt, instead of inordinate love,—unless, mayhap, I am myself deceived in this matter, and attribute to humility what is really due to pride. What I mean by all this you shall now hear.

You are familiar, no doubt, with that widely distributed and vulgar set of men who live by words, and those not their own, and who have increased to such an irritating extent among us. They are persons of no great ability, but of retentive memories; of great industry too, but of greater audacity. They haunt the antechambers of kings and potentates, naked if it were not for the poetic vesture that they have filched from others. Any especially good bit which this one or that one has turned off, they seize upon, more particularly if it be in the mother tongue, and recite it with huge gusto. In this way they strive to gain the favour of the nobility, and procure money, clothes, or other gifts. Their stock-in-trade is partly picked up here and there, partly obtained directly from the writers themselves, either by begging, or, where cupidity or poverty exists, for money. This last case is described by the Satirist: "He will die of hunger if he does not succeed in selling to Paris his yet unheard *Agave*." [1]

You can easily imagine how often these fellows have pestered me, and I doubt not others, with their disgusting fawning. It is true I suffer less than formerly, owing to my altered studies, or to respect for my age, or to repulses already received; for, lest they should get in the habit of annoying me, I have

[1] Juvenal, vii., 87.

often sharply refused to aid them, and have not allowed myself to be affected by any amount of insistence. Sometimes indeed, especially when I knew the applicant to be humble and needy, a certain benevolent instinct has led me to assist the poor fellow to a living, with such skill as I possessed. My aid might be of permanent use to the recipient, while it cost me only a short hour of work. Some of those whom I had been induced to assist, and who had left me with their wish fulfilled, but otherwise poor and ill-clad, returned shortly after arrayed in silks, with well-filled bellies and purses, to thank me for the assistance which had enabled them to cast off the burden of poverty. On such occasions I have sometimes been led to vow that I would never refuse this peculiar kind of alms; but there always comes a moment, when, wearied by their importunities, I retract the resolve.

When I asked some of these beggars why they always came to me, and never applied to others, and in particular to you, for assistance, they replied that so far as you were concerned they had often done so, but never with success. While I was wondering that one who was so generous with his property should be so niggardly with his words, they added that you had burnt all the verses which you had ever written in the vulgar tongue. This, instead of satisfying me, only served to increase my astonishment. When I asked the reason of your doing this, they all confessed ignorance and held their tongues, except one. He said that he believed —whether he had actually heard it somewhere or

other, I do not know—that you intended to revise all the things which you had written both in your earlier days, and, later, in your prime, in order to give your works, in this revision, the advantage of a mature,—I am tempted to say hoary, mind. Such confidence in the prolongation of our most uncertain existence, especially at your age, seemed to both of us exaggerated. Although I have the greatest confidence in your discretion and vigour of mind, my surprise was only increased by what I had heard. What a perverted idea, I said, to burn up what you wished to revise, so as to have nothing left for revision!

My astonishment continued until at last, on coming to this city, I became intimate with our Donato, who is so faithful and devoted a friend of yours. It was from him that I learned recently, in the course of our daily conversation, not only the fact which I had already heard, but also the explanation of it, which had so long puzzled me. He said that in your earlier years you had been especially fond of writing in the vulgar tongue, and had devoted much time and pains to it, until in the course of your researches and reading you had happened upon my youthful compositions in the vernacular. Then your enthusiasm for writing similar things suddenly cooled. Not content simply to refrain from analogous work in the future, you conceived a great dislike to what you had already done and burned everything, not with the idea of correcting but of destroying. In this way you deprived both yourself and posterity of the fruits of your labours

in this field of literature, and for no better reason than that you thought what you had written was inferior to my productions. But your dislike was ill-founded and the sacrifice inexpedient. As for your motive, that is doubtful. Was it humility, which despised itself, or pride, which would be second to none? You who can see your own heart must judge. I can only wander among the various possible conjectures, writing to you, as usual, as if I were talking to myself.

I congratulate you, then, on regarding yourself as inferior to those whose superior you really are. I would far rather share that error than his who, being really inferior, believes himself to be on a higher plane. This reminds me of Lucan of Cordova, a man of the ardent spirit and the genius which pave the way alike to great eminence and to an abyss of failure. Finding himself far advanced in his studies while still young, he became, upon turning over in his mind his age and the successful beginnings of his career, so puffed up that he ventured to compare himself with Virgil. In reciting a portion of a work on the Civil War, which was interrupted by his death, he said in his introductory remarks, "Do I in any way fall short of the *Culex?*"[1] Whether this arrogant speech was noticed by any friend of the poet, or what answer he received, I do not know; for myself, I have often, since I read the passage, inwardly replied indignantly to this braggart: "My fine fellow, thy performance may in-

[1] A trifling poem once universally attributed to Virgil.

deed equal the *Culex*, but what a gulf between it and the *Æneid!*" But why, then, do I not praise your humility, who judge me to be your superior, and praise it the more highly in contrast with the boast of this upstart, who would believe himself superior, or at least equal, to Virgil?

But there is something else here which I would gladly discover, but which is of so obscure a nature that it is not easily cleared up with the pen. I will, however, do the best I can. I fear that your remarkable humility may after all be only pride. This will doubtless seem to many a novel and even surprising name for humility, and if it should prove offensive I will use some other term. I only fear that this signal exhibition of humility is not altogether free from some admixture of haughtiness. I have seen men at a banquet, or some other assembly, rise and voluntarily take the lowest place, because they had not been assigned the head of the table, and this under cover of humility, although pride was the real motive. I have seen another so weak as even to leave the room. Thus anger sometimes, and sometimes pride, leads men to act as though one who did not enjoy the highest seat, which in the nature of things cannot be assigned to more than a single individual, was necessarily unworthy of any place except perhaps the lowest. But there are degrees of glory as well as of merit.

As for you, you show your humility in not assuming the first place. Some, inferior to you both in talents and style, have laid claim to it, and have aroused our indignation, not unmixed with merri-

ment, by their absurd aspirations. Would that the support of the vulgar, which they sometimes enjoy, weighed no more in the market-place than with the dwellers on Parnassus. But not to be able to take the second or third rank, does not that smack of genuine pride? Suppose for the moment that I surpass you, I, who would so gladly be your equal; suppose that you are surpassed by the great master of our mother tongue; beware lest there be more pride in refusing to see yourself distanced by one or the other, especially by your fellow-citizen, or, at most, by a very few, than in soliciting the distinction of the first place for yourself. To long for supremacy may be regarded as the sign of a great mind, but to despise what only approaches supremacy is a certain indication of arrogance.

I have heard that our Old Man of Ravenna,[1] who is by no means a bad judge in such matters, is accustomed, whenever the conversation turns on these matters, to assign you the third place. If this displeases you, and if you think that I prevent your attaining to the first rank—though I am really no obstacle—I willingly renounce all pretensions to precedence, and leave you the second place. If you refuse this I do not think that you ought to be pardoned. If the very first alone are illustrious, it is easy to see how innumerable are the obscure, and how few enjoy the radiance of glory. Consider, moreover, how much safer, and even higher, is the

[1] It is not known who is meant here. *Cf.* Fracassetti, *Lettere Senile*, vol. i., p. 283.

second place. There is someone to receive the first attacks of envy, and, at the risk of his own reputation, to indicate your path; for by watching his course, you will learn when to follow it, and when to avoid it. You have someone to aid you to throw off all slothful habits through your effort to overtake him. You are spurred on to equal him, and not be forever second. Such an one serves as a goad to noble minds and often accomplishes wonders. He who knows how to put up with the second place will ere long deserve the first, while he who scorns the second place has already begun to be unworthy even of that. If you will but consult your memory, you will scarcely find a first-rate commander, philosopher, or poet, who did not reach the top through the aid of just such stimulus.

Furthermore, if the first place is to most persons a source of complacent satisfaction with themselves, and of envy on the part of others, it is certainly also liable to produce inertia. The student as well as the lover is spurred on by jealousy: love without rivalry, and merit without emulation are equally prone to languish. Industrious poverty is much to be preferred to idle opulence. It is better to struggle up a steep declivity with watchful care than to lie sunk in shameful ease; better and safer to trust to the aid of active virtue than to rely upon the distinction of an idle reputation.

These are good reasons, it seems to me, for cheerfully accepting the second place. But what if you are assigned to the third or the fourth? Will this rouse your anger? or have you forgotten the

passage where Seneca defends Fabianus Papirius against Lucilius? After assigning Cicero a higher rank, he remarked: "It is no slight thing to be second only to the highest." Then, naming Asinius Pollio next to Cicero, he added, "Nor in such a case is the third place to be despised." Lastly, placing Livy in the fourth rank, he concluded, "What a vast number of writers does he excel who is vanquished by three only, and these three the most gifted!" Does not this apply very well to you, my dear friend? Only, whatever place you occupy, or whomsoever you may seem to see ahead of you, it cannot, in my judgment, be I who precede you. So, eschew the flames, and have mercy on your verses.

If, however, you and others are, in spite of what I say, thoroughly convinced that I must, willy-nilly, be your superior in literary rank, do you really feel aggrieved, and regard it as a shameful thing to be ranked next to me? If this be true, permit me to say that I have long been deceived in you, and that neither your natural modesty nor your love of me is what I had hoped. True friends place those whom they love above themselves. They not only wish to be excelled, but experience an extreme pleasure in being outstripped, just as no fond father would deny that his greatest pleasure consisted in being surpassed by his son. I hoped and hope still that I am inferior to you. I do not claim to be like a dear son to you, or to believe that my reputation is dearer to you than your own. I remember, though, that you, in a moment of friendly anger, once re-

proached me for this. If you were really sincere, you ought to grant me the right of way with joy. Instead of giving up the race, you should press after me with all your might, and so prevent any other competitor from thrusting himself between us and stealing your place. He who sits in the chariot or runs by his friend's side does not ask who is first, but is only anxious that they two shall be as near as possible. Nothing is sweeter than the longed-for closeness of companionship. Love is everything, precedence next to nothing, among friends. The first are last and the last first, for all are really one in friendship.

So much for the case against you. Let us now turn to the excuses for your conduct. In spite of your own explanation and that which comes to me through such a very good friend of yours, I have tried to discover some higher motive for your action than that which you mention; for the same act may be good or bad according to the motives which dictate it. I will tell you, then, what has occurred to me.

You did not destroy your productions, in a manner so unfair both to you and to them, through false pride, which is quite foreign to your gentle character; nor because you were jealous of someone else, or dissatisfied with your own lot. You were actuated by a noble indignation against the emptiness and vanity of our age, which in its crass ignorance corrupts or, far worse, despises everything good. You wished to withdraw your productions from the judgment of the men of to-day, and,

as Virginius once slew his own daughter to save her from shame, so you have committed to the flames your beautiful inventions, the children of your intellect, to prevent their becoming the prey of such a rabble. And now, my dear friend, how near the truth have I guessed ? I have indeed often thought of doing the same for my own compositions in the vulgar tongue, few as they are; and it was my own experience which suggested this explanation of your conduct. I should perhaps have done so, had they not been so widely circulated as to have long ago escaped my control. And yet, on the other hand, I have sometimes harboured quite the opposite design, and thought of devoting my whole attention to the vernacular.

To be sure, the Latin, in both prose and poetry, is undoubtedly the nobler language, but for that very reason it has been so thoroughly developed by earlier writers that neither we nor anyone else may expect to add very much to it. The vernacular, on the other hand, has but recently been discovered, and, though it has been ravaged by many, it still remains uncultivated, in spite of a few earnest labourers, and still shows itself capable of much improvement and enrichment. Stimulated by this thought, and by the enterprise of youth, I began an extensive work in that language. I laid the foundations of the structure, and got together my lime and stones and wood. And then I began to consider a little more carefully the times in which we live, the fact that our age is the mother of pride and indolence, and that the ability of the vainglorious fellows

who would be my judges, and their peculiar grace of delivery is such that they can hardly be said to recite the writings of others, but rather to mangle them. Hearing their performances again and again, and turning the matter over in my mind, I concluded at length that I was building upon unstable earth and shifting sand, and should simply waste my labours and see the work of my hands levelled by the common herd. Like one who finds a great serpent across his track, I stopped and changed my route,—for a higher and more direct one, I hope. Although the short things I once wrote in the vulgar tongue are, as I have said, so scattered that they now belong to the public rather than to me, I shall take precautions against having my more important works torn to pieces in the same way.

And yet why should I find fault with the unenlightenment of the common people, when those who call themselves learned afford so much more just and serious a ground for complaint? Besides many other ridiculous peculiarities, these people add to their gross ignorance an exaggerated and most disgusting pride. It is this that leads them to carp at the reputation of those whose most trivial sayings they were once proud to comprehend, in even the most fragmentary fashion. O inglorious age! that scorns antiquity, its mother, to whom it owes every noble art,—that dares to declare itself not only equal but superior to the glorious past. I say nothing of the vulgar, the dregs of mankind, whose sayings and opinions may raise a laugh but hardly merit serious censure. I will say nothing of the military class

and the leaders in war, who do not blush to assert that their time has beheld the culmination and perfection of military art, when there is no doubt that this art has degenerated and is utterly going to ruin in their hands. They have neither skill nor intelligence, but rely entirely upon indolence and chance. They go to war decked out as if for a wedding, bent on meat and drink and the gratification of their lust. They think much more of flight than they do of victory. Their skill lies not in striking the adversary, but in holding out the hand of submission; not in terrifying the enemy, but in pleasing the eyes of their mistresses.[1] But even these false notions may be excused in view of the utter ignorance and want of instruction on the part of those who hold them.

I will pass over the kings, who act as if they thought that their office consisted in purple and gold, in sceptre and diadem, and that, excelling their predecessors in these things, they must excel them likewise in prowess and glory. Although they were put upon the throne for the single purpose of ruling (whence their title, *rex*, is derived), they do not in reality govern the people over whom they are placed, but, as their conduct shows, are themselves governed by their passions. They are rulers of men, but, at the same time, slaves of sloth and luxury. Still ignorance of the past, the ephemeral glory that fortune bestows and the vanity that always attends undue prosperity, may serve to excuse in some

[1] Machiavelli's *Prince*, chap. xii., contains a similar description of war in his day.

measure even these. But what can be said in defence of men of education who ought not to be ignorant of antiquity and yet are plunged in this same darkness and delusion ?

You see that I cannot speak of these matters without the greatest irritation and indignation. There has arisen of late a set of dialecticians, who are not only ignorant but demented. Like a black army of ants from some old rotten oak, they swarm forth from their hiding-places and devastate the fields of sound learning. They condemn Plato and Aristotle, and laugh at Socrates and Pythagoras. And, good God! under what silly and incompetent leaders these opinions are put forth! I should prefer not to give a name to this group of men. They have done nothing to merit one, though their folly has made them famous. I do not wish to place among the greatest of mankind those whom I see consorting with the most abject. These fellows have deserted all trustworthy leaders, and glory in the name of those who, whatever they may learn after death, exhibited in this world no trace of power, or knowledge, or reputation for knowledge. What shall we say of men who scorn Marcus Tullius Cicero, the bright sun of eloquence ? Of those who scoff at Varro and Seneca, and are scandalised at what they choose to call the crude, unfinished style of Livy and Sallust ? And all this in obedience to leaders of whom no one has ever heard, and for whom their followers ought to blush! Once I happened to be present when Virgil's style was the subject of their scornful criticism. Astonished at their crazy out-

break, I turned to a person of some cultivation and asked what he had detected in this famous man to rouse such a storm of reproach. Listen to the reply he gave me, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders: "He is too fond of conjunctions." Arise, O Virgil, and polish the verses that, with the aid of the Muses, thou didst snatch from heaven, in order that they may be fit to deliver into hands like these!

How shall I deal with that other monstrous kind of pedant, who wears a religious garb, but is most profane in heart and conduct; who would have us believe that Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome were ignoramuses, for all their elaborate treatises? I do not know the origin of these new theologians, who do not spare the great teachers, and will not much longer spare the Apostles and the Gospel itself. They will soon turn their impudent tongues even against Christ, unless he, whose cause is at stake, interferes and curbs the raging beasts. It has already become a well-established habit with these fellows to express their scorn by a mute gesture or by some impious observation, whenever revered and sacred names are mentioned. "Augustine," they will say, "saw much, but understood little." Nor do they speak less insultingly of other great men.

Recently one of these philosophers of the modern stamp happened to be in my library. He did not, like the others, wear a religious habit, but, after all, Christianity is not a matter of clothes. He was one of those who think they live in vain unless they are constantly snarling at Christ or his divine teach-

ings. When I cited some passage or other from the Holy Scriptures, he exploded with wrath, and with his face, naturally ugly, still further disfigured by anger and contempt, he exclaimed: "You are welcome to your two-penny church fathers; as for me, I know the man for me to follow, *for I know him whom I have believed.*" "You," I replied, "use the words of the Apostle. I would that you would take them to heart!" "Your Apostle," he answered, "was a sower of words and a lunatic." "You reply like a good philosopher," I said. "The first of your accusations was brought against him by other philosophers, and the second to his face by Festus, Governor of Syria. He did indeed sow the word, and with such success that, cultivated by the beneficent plough of his successors and watered by the holy blood of the martyrs, it has borne such an abundant harvest of faith as we all behold." At this he burst forth into a sickening roar of laughter. "Well, be a 'good Christian'![1] As for me, I put no faith in all that stuff. Your Paul and your Augustine and all the rest of the crowd you preach about were a set of babblers. If you could but stomach Averroes you would quickly see how much superior he was to these empty-headed fellows of yours." I was very angry, I must confess, and could scarcely keep from striking his filthy, blasphemous mouth. "It is the old feud between me and other heretics of your class. You can go," I cried, "you and your heresy, and never re-

[1] Luther reports that in his time, in Rome, they called an earnest believer "bon Christian."

turn." With this I plucked him by the gown, and, with a want of ceremony less consonant with my habits than his own, hustled him out of the house.

There are thousands of instances of this kind, where nothing will prevail,—not even the majesty of the Christian name nor reverence for Christ himself (whom the angels fall down and worship, though weak and depraved mortals may insult him), nor yet the fear of punishment or the armed inquisitors of heresy. The prison and stake are alike impotent to restrain the impudence of ignorance or the audacity of heresy.

Such are the times, my friend, upon which we have fallen; such is the period in which we live and are growing old. Such are the critics of to-day, as I so often have occasion to lament and complain,—men who are innocent of knowledge or virtue, and yet harbour the most exalted opinion of themselves. Not content with losing the words of the ancients, they must attack their genius and their ashes. They rejoice in their ignorance, as if what they did not know were not worth knowing. They give full rein to their licence and conceit, and freely introduce among us new authors and outlandish teachings.

If you, having no other means of defence, have resorted to the fire to save your works from the criticism of such despotic judges, I cannot disapprove the act and must commend your motives. I have done the same with many of my own productions, and almost repent me that I did not include all, while it was yet in my power; for we have no prospect of fairer judges, while the number and au-

dacity of the existing ones grow from day to day. They are no longer confined to the schools, but fill the largest towns, choking up the streets and public squares. We are come to such a pass that I am sometimes angry at myself for having been so vexed by the recent warlike and destructive years, and having bemoaned the depopulation of the earth. It is perhaps depopulated of true men, but was never more densely crowded with vices and the creatures of vice. In short, had I been among the Ædiles, and felt as I do now, I should have acquitted the daughter of Appius Claudius.[1]—But now farewell, as I have nothing more to write to you at present.

VENICE, August 28.

The belief that the Middle Age was an age of faith has so long found universal acceptance that Petrarch's *rencontre* with a group of men who freely made sport of Christianity may seem anomalous to some. There was, however, a wide-spread and persistent tendency toward rationalism and materialism in the universities during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Christianity was evidently repudiated by no inconsiderable number, for the church found it necessary to promulgate a sweeping condemnation of rationalistic theses at Paris in 1277. Early in the thirteenth cent-

[1] Who was fined for speaking against the Roman people.

ury Arabic learning had begun to influence Western Europe, and the writings of Arabic philosophers, especially of Averroes,[1] became widely known. The orthodox schoolmen, like Thomas Aquinas, gladly made use of his commentary upon Aristotle, but rejected his philosophic teachings with horror. Others, however, became enamoured of the Arabic philosophy and deserted their former religious beliefs, even venturing somewhat publicly to denounce Christianity, as fit only for those who were incapable of following Averroes. Among the simple and devout, the Arabian became an object of mysterious abhorrence, so that Orcagna in his frescoes gives him a distinguished place among the damned, with Mohammed and Antichrist.[2]

During his residence in Venice and Padua Petrarch came into close contact with the Averroists, and was led more than once, in his irritation at their unbelief, to attack them violently.[3] Of their philosophical tenets nothing

[1] A corruption of the Arabic name of Ibn Roschd, who died in 1198.

[2] For this whole matter see Renan's charming book, *Averroes*. Also, Reuter's *Religiöse Aufklärung des Mittelalters*.

[3] Especially remarkable in this connection is the curious work *De Suiipsius et Aliorum Ignorantia*, the origin of which may be briefly described. A group of Petrarch's young Averroist friends happened one day in a post-prandial conversation to discuss among them-

need be said here, as Petrarch probably troubled himself but little about their doctrines. It was enough for him that they called Paul a madman and looked upon Augustine and Ambrose as prating fools. The real interest of Petrarch's assault upon the Averroists lies not so much in his rejection of their heresies as in his attitude toward the intellectual hero of the Middle Ages, Aristotle, who was the accepted authority of those who rejected, as well as of those who implicitly trusted, the Gospel. The importance of this has, however, already been noted.[1]

We have seen how little Petrarch was in sympathy with the intellectual interests of his time. The vast theological literature of the thirteenth century was neither represented in his library nor noticed in his works. Pure logic, which was then looked upon not only as

selves his real claim to distinction. They decided that his fame rested largely upon the mistaken and ill-judged attentions of popes and princes, and that, although a good man, he could not be regarded as a person of great knowledge or literary power. This frank estimate of his ability reached the ears of Petrarch and naturally irritated the now failing old man, accustomed for many years to the world's adulation. The reply, written a year later, shows unmistakable signs of wounded pride and vanity. The criticism of the young men was, he assumes, dictated purely by envy of his reputation. He is indeed ignorant, but others are still more hopelessly benighted—hence the title, Of His Own Ignorance and That of Others. *Opera* (1581), pp., 1035–1059.

[1] See above, pp. 37 *sqq*.

the necessary foundation of all sound learning and the key to all science but as a legitimate and worthy occupation of a lifetime, seemed to him an essentially elementary subject, fit only for boys. As he refused to recognise the supremacy of Aristotle himself, so he rejected the absurd claims made for Aristotle's dialectic. The following letter, written apparently while he was still a young man, shows how correctly he estimated the real educational value of a study with which his predecessors and contemporaries were so notoriously infatuated.

His Aversion to Logicians

To Tomasso da Messina[1]

It is hazardous to engage an enemy who longs rather for battle than for victory. You write to me of a certain old logician who has been greatly excited by my letter, as if I condemned his art. With a growl of rage, he loudly threatened to make war in turn upon our studies, in a letter for which, you say, you have waited many months in vain. Do not wait longer; believe me, it will never come. He retains some traces of decency, and this is a confession that he is ashamed of his style or an acknowledgment of his ignorance. The most implacable in contests with the tongue will not resort to the pen. They are reluctant to show how ill-armed they are,

[1] *Fam.*, i., 6.

and so follow the Parthian system of warfare, carried on during a rapid retreat, by letting fly a shower of winged words and committing their shafts to the wind.

It is foolhardy, as I have said, to accept an engagement with these fellows upon their own terms. It is indeed from the fighting itself that they derive their chief pleasure; their object is not to discover the truth, but to prolong the argument. But you know Varro's proverb: "Through over-long contention the truth is lost." You need not fear, then, that these warriors will come out into the open fields of honest discussion, whether with tongue or pen. They belong to the class of whom Quintilian speaks in his *Institutes of Oratory*, whom one finds wonderfully warm in disputation, but once get them away from their cavilling, they are as helpless, in a serious juncture, as certain small animals which are active enough in a narrow space, but are easily captured in a field. Hence their reluctance to engage in an open contest. As Quintilian goes on to say, their tergiversations indicate their weakness; they seek, like an indifferent runner, to escape by dodging.

This is what I would impress upon you, my friend; if you are seeking virtue or truth, avoid persons of that stripe altogether. But how shall we escape from these maniacs, if even the isles of the sea are not free from them? So neither Scylla nor Charybdis has prevented this pest from finding its way into Sicily?[1] Nay, this ill is now rather

[1] His friend's home.

peculiar to islands, as we shall find if we add the logicians of Britain to the new Cyclopes about Ætna. Is this the ground of the striking similarity between Sicily and Britain, which I have seen mentioned in Pomponius Mela's *Cosmographia?* I had thought that the resemblance lay in the situation of the countries, the almost triangular appearance of both, and perhaps in the perpetual contact which each enjoys with the surrounding sea. I never thought of logicians; I had heard of the Cyclopes, and then of the tyrants, both savage inhabitants; but of the coming of this third race of monsters, armed with two-edged arguments, and fiercer than the burning shores of Taormina itself, I was unaware.

There is one thing which I myself long ago observed, and of which you now warn me anew. These logicians seek to cover their teachings with the splendour of Aristotle's name; they claim that Aristotle was wont to argue in the same way. They would have some excuse, I readily confess, if they followed in the steps of illustrious leaders, for even Cicero says that it would give him pleasure to err with Plato, if err he must. But they all deceive themselves. Aristotle was a man of the most exalted genius, who not only discussed but wrote upon themes of the very highest importance. How can we otherwise explain so vast an array of works, involving such prolonged labour, and prepared with supreme care amid such serious preoccupations—especially those connected with the guardianship of his fortunate pupil—and within the compass, too, of a life by no means long?—for he died at about sixty-

three, the age which all writers deem so unlucky. Now why should these fellows diverge so widely from the path of their leader? Why is not the name of Aristotelians a source of shame to them rather than of satisfaction, for no one could be more utterly different from that great philosopher than a man who writes nothing, knows but little, and constantly indulges in much vain declamation? Who does not laugh at their trivial conclusions, with which, although educated men,[1] they weary both themselves and others? They waste their whole lives in such contentions. Not only are they good for nothing else, but their perverted activity renders them actually harmful. Disputations such as they delight in are made a subject of mirth by Cicero and Seneca, in several passages. We find an example in the case of Diogenes, whom a contentious logician addressed as follows: "What I am, you are not." Upon Diogenes conceding this, the logician added, "But I am a man." As this was not denied, the poor quibbler propounded the conclusion, "Therefore you are not a man." "The last statement is not true," Diogenes remarked, "but if you wish it to be true, begin with me in your major premise." Similar absurdities are common enough with them. What they hope to gain from their efforts, whether fame or amusement, or some light upon the way to live righteously and happily, they may know; to me, I

[1] *Homines litterati*, probably simply those versed in the Latin tongue.

confess, it is the greatest of mysteries. Money, certainly, does not appeal at least to noble minds as a worthy reward of study. It is for the mechanical trades to strive for lucre; the higher arts have a more generous end in view.

On hearing such things as these, those of whom we are speaking grow furious;—indeed the chatter of the disputatious man usually verges closely on anger. "So you set yourself up to condemn logic," they cry. Far from it; I know well in what esteem it was held by that sturdy and virile sect of philosophers, the Stoics, whom our Cicero frequently mentions, especially in his work *De Finibus.* I know that it is one of the liberal studies, a ladder for those who are striving upwards, and by no means a useless protection to those who are forcing their way through the thorny thickets of philosophy. It stimulates the intellect, points out the way of truth, shows us how to avoid fallacies, and finally, if it accomplishes nothing else, makes us ready and quick-witted.

All this I readily admit, but because a road is proper for us to traverse, it does not immediately follow that we should linger on it forever. No traveller, unless he be mad, will forget his destination on account of the pleasures of the way; his characteristic virtue lies, on the contrary, in reaching his goal as soon as possible, never halting on the road. And who of us is not a traveller? We all have our long and arduous journey to accomplish in a brief and untoward time,—on a short, tempestuous, wintry day as it were. Dialectics may form a

portion of our road, but certainly not its end: it belongs to the morning of life, not to its evening. We may have done once with perfect propriety what it would be shameful to continue. If as mature men we cannot leave the schools of logic because we have found pleasure in them as boys, why should we blush to play odd and even, or prance upon a shaky reed, or be rocked again in the cradle of our childhood? Nature, with cunning artifice, escapes from dull monotony by her wondrous change of seasons, with their varying aspects. Shall we look for these alternations in the circuit of the year, and not in the course of a long life? The spring brings flowers and the new leaves of the trees, the summer is rich in its harvest, autumn in fruit, and then comes winter with its snows. In this order the changes are not only tolerable but agreeable; but if the order were to be altered, against the laws of nature, they would become distasteful. No one would suffer with equanimity the cold of winter in summer time, or a raging sun during the months where it does not belong.

Who would not scorn and deride an old man who sported with children, or marvel at a grizzled and gouty stripling? What is more necessary to our training than our first acquaintance with the alphabet itself, which serves as the foundation of all later studies; but, on the other hand, what could be more absurd than a grandfather still busy over his letters?

Use my arguments with the disciples of your ancient logician. Do not deter them from the study

of logic; urge them rather to hasten through it to better things. Tell the old fellow himself that it is not the liberal arts which I condemn, but only hoary-headed children. Even as nothing is more disgraceful, as Seneca says, than an old man just beginning his alphabet, so there is no spectacle more unseemly than a person of mature years devoting himself to dialectics. But if your friend begins to vomit forth syllogisms, I advise you to take flight, bidding him argue with Enceladus.[1] Farewell.

AVIGNON, March 11.

[1] It is interesting to compare these views with those of John of Salisbury who, writing almost two centuries before the time of Petrarch's letter says: "It seemed to me pleasant to revisit my old companions on the Mount [of St. Geneviève at Paris], whom I had left and whom dialectic still detained, and to confer with them touching the old subjects of debate, that we might by mutual comparison measure our respective progress. I found them as before, and where they were before; they did not appear to have advanced an inch in settling the old questions, nor had they added a single proposition. The aims that once inspired them inspired them still; they had progressed in one point only, they had unlearned moderation, they knew not modesty; and that to such an extent that one might despair of their recovery. So experience taught me a manifest conclusion, that, while logic furthers other studies, it is by itself lifeless and barren, nor can it cause the mind to yield the fruit of philosophy except the same conceive from some other source." Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, vol. cxcix., p. 869.

III

THE FATHER OF HUMANISM

Quæ cum scholæ atque ævi comitibus quædam quasi somnia viderentur, mihi jam tunc, omnia videntem testor Deum, et vera et pæne præsentia videbantur.

Fam., xxiv., 1.

EVERY age has a philosophy of life, which reaches and affects, in greater or less degree, the thought and action of all of its members. To the centuries before Petrarch the world was a place in which to prepare for a life beyond; the noblest subject of thought was theology; the saving of the soul was the one important task. The centuries since have realised in some measure that the present life is precious in itself, and is not to be thus subordinated. This shifting of the view is of immense significance; and it is owing to Petrarch, more than to any other one man.

The process was, after all, not so much a shifting as a blending, a powerful modification of the mediæval notions by those of the ancient world. The ancients frankly delighted in sensuous beauty, and felt an unrestrained joy in mere living, and trusted nature and the natural impulses. They were thoroughly human, and the return to them humanised

the narrow conceptions of the Middle Ages. And this return was largely Petrarch's work.

Men had conversed with the classics before his day. They were by no means unstudied in mediæval times. John of Salisbury, for example, in the twelfth century, had known almost as many of the Roman poets and moralists and historians as Petrarch himself. He had known them, however, and used them, in a very different fashion. He had read them with no surrender to their charm, and no response to their views concerning life and its uses. We wonder at his knowledge of the text of his classical authors, and at the aptness with which he cites them in illustration of his thought; but we wonder still more at his utter inability to understand their attitude, to find their point of view. Lifelong intercourse with them failed to widen his range of vision. Despite their influence he remained mediæval in all his thought.

But with Petrarch it was otherwise. He first, among the men of the Middle Ages, was endowed with a passionate love for the beauty of ancient literature, and an entire sympathy with its ruling ideas, and at the same time, it must be observed, with a saving incapacity to foresee the disintegration of thought and

faith that in the long run would inevitably result from such sympathy. Both in his strength and in his weakness he was eminently fitted to be the founder, or furtherer, of Humanism.

Petrarch's love of the classics began in admiration of their more superficial charm, which is just what would be expected of the youth who wrote the graceful lyrics of the *Canzoniere*. But this feeling developed soon into a perception of their deeper beauty and significance. At the time when he first becomes thoroughly known to us as a student of antiquity we are amazed at the justness of his appreciation. Only occasionally does he betray the fact that he is a man of the Middle Ages, hampered by a narrow intellectual inheritance; and that his work is that of a pioneer, in a country which is absolutely unexplored.

Of these rare limitations we detect the fewest traces in his criticism of Cicero. This may be accounted for largely on the ground that Cicero and Petrarch were men of the same temperament and cast of mind. They were both typical men of letters. The man of letters is intellectually alert; sensitive to impressions and able to report them; hospitable to all the ideas of his time; sometimes incon-

sistent, because of this very catholicity; and often despised in consequence by practical men, although in reality more practical than they, inasmuch as he has the art of communicating his flashes of insight and his generous enthusiasm to others, who in the end reconcile his inconsistencies and make his dreams come true. This is an exceptional character, but Cicero sustained it fully, and so did Petrarch too. They were thus of the same stamp. Moreover, their circumstances were similar in many respects. Cicero's task as an interpreter of Greek thought was not unlike Petrarch's life-work. It was impossible, with all these likenesses, that the one, however defective his knowledge, should fail to comprehend the other.

Petrarch's letters afford countless illustrations of the truth of these statements. In outward form, to be sure, and once in a while in their material and the treatment of it, they suggest rather Seneca than Cicero. That, however, is easily explained. Petrarch's epistolary ways had been fully determined before ever he saw Cicero's correspondence, or any portion of it.[1]

[1] He did not discover the group *Ad Atticum* until 1345, when he was more than forty years old. And Voigt and Viertel have shown that the very existence of the *Ad Familiares* was unknown to him.

So it was quite impossible that he should follow him in matters of fashion and form. But in spirit and intention, in all their deeper affinities, the letters are distinctly Ciceronian, akin to Cicero's essays and treatises. Cicero's style is plainly Petrarch's ideal, although he is too wise to imitate it slavishly. And he falls, at his best, not very far short of Cicero's clearness and animation, his variety, his aptness of quotation and illustration. A clearer case of sympathetic comprehension of another, and of reproduction without imitation, it would be hard to find.

Next to Cicero, Petrarch cared most among Roman writers for Virgil. One would have expected to find this order reversed,—to find the poet of the *Africa* far more devoted to his great forerunner than to one who was essentially unpoetical, a rhetorician and prosaist. The explanation of the seeming anomaly is twofold. In the first place, it was in temperament only that Petrarch was a poet, and not, after the splendid lyrical outburst of the *Canzoniere*, in the whole compass of his thought and feeling. He could not have done the work which he did if it had been otherwise. It was necessary that the first Humanist should combine with the poet's

openness of mind, and love of whatever is beautiful, scholarly patience and a willingness to lead a scholar's life. And then, in the second place, Petrarch was debarred from full appreciation of Virgil by an inability to escape from the dominion of certain mediæval conceptions of poetry.

For one thing, he valued poetry largely in proportion as it is made the vehicle of criticism of life, of the more obvious sort. One is surprised, in examining the numerous quotations from Virgil that are scattered throughout the letters, to find how invariably they are chosen either because they are strikingly rhetorical in form or in consequence of their didactic quality. Poetry seems to have become to Petrarch, as his life and his studies advanced and he drew farther away in time and temper from his early creative period, little more than a somewhat finer form of prose. Virgil, with all his reverence for him, was not unlike another Cicero. He says in one of his letters: "Our beloved Cicero is beyond doubt the father of Latin eloquence. Next to him comes Virgil. Or perhaps, since there are some who dislike the order in which I am placing them, I had better say that Tullius and Maro are the two parents of Roman literature." Such remarks,

which are not infrequent, are indicative of an incapacity to feel keenly and enjoy deeply what is finest in Virgil. Petrarch seems to us to-day like a child, who values the beautiful commonplaces of the poet more highly than his occasional soundings of the depths and mysteries of life. He had no adequate appreciation of Virgil's 'majestic sadness,' his 'pathetic half lines,' his 'tears for the things that are.'

To this same insensitiveness on the æsthetic side we must ascribe Petrarch's inability to free himself from the mediæval delusion as to the profound allegorical significance of the *Æneid*, and of all other noble poetry as well. A true poet may entertain very strange theories concerning the nature of his art, but in his better moments he will rise above them and unconsciously belie them, both in his practice and in his criticism of others. This Petrarch, after his early youth, never did. His highest aim in his own poetical compositions was to set forth moral truths under an obscure veil of allegory, and his greatest delight in studying the poets of antiquity was to penetrate the veil under which he believed they had hidden their wisdom. Dante's chance lines in the ninth book of the *Inferno* give exact expression

to this ruling thought of his :

> O voi che avete gl' intelletti sani,
> Mirate la dottrina che s' asconde
> Sotto il velame degli versi strani !

Dante's application of this idea, however, was one thing and Petrarch's another. Petrarch aimed at nothing worthier than a multitude of minute and trivial correspondences. The effect upon his verse is indicated by the letter to his brother Gherardo which is given toward the close of this chapter. The effect upon his criticism may be learned by examining certain other letters, in the *Seniles*. In one of these he says :[1]

" Virgil's subject, as I understand the matter, is The Perfect Man. . . . In the passage that you ask me to explain I look upon the winds as nothing more nor less than blasts of anger and mad desire, which disturb with their wild storms the quiet of our life, as tempests do some tranquil sea. Æolus is our reason, which curbs and controls these headstrong passions. If it did not do so they would sweep away sea and land and the overarching sky, that is, our blood and flesh and bones and our very souls, and plunge them down to death

[1] *Sen.*, iv., 4

and destruction :

> . . . maria ac terras cœlumque profundum
> quippe ferant rapidi secum.

The dark caverns where Virgil represents them as being hidden away, what are they but the hollow and hidden parts of our bodies, where, according to Plato's determination, the passions dwell in abodes of their own, in the breast and entrails? The mountain mass which is placed above them is the head, where Plato thinks the reason has its home. . . . Venus, who meets them in the middle of the wood, is pleasure, whose pursuit by us becomes hotter and keener toward the middle of our life. Her assumption of a maidenly look and air is for the purpose of deceiving the unwary. If we saw her as she is we should flee from her in fear and trembling; for, as there is nothing more tempting than pleasure, so there is nothing more foul. Her garments are girded up because her flight is swift. For this same reason she is compared to the swiftest of creatures and things.[1] It cannot be denied that nothing swifter exists, whether you consider her comprehensively or part by part; for pleasure as a whole passes from us very soon, and even

[1] . . . . . qualis equos Threissa fatigat
Harpalyce volucremque fuga prævertitur Hebrum.

while it still abides with us each taste of it lasts but a moment. And then, finally, she appears in the garb of a huntress, because she hunts for the souls of miserable mortals. And she has a bow, and has flowing hair, in order that she may smite us and charm us." [1]

Petrarch's love for Cicero and Virgil sprang from what one may call the fundamental humanistic impulse, delight in the free play of the mind among ideas that are stimulating and beautiful. His devotion to Livy came, in part, from a different source, from a singular sort of patriotism. He felt that he, and every other Italian of his day, was descended in a certain sense from the Romans of old; that their glory was his rightful heritage; that Rome, the ancient Rome, which he found still in existence beneath the wretched mediæval stronghold, was the city of his love and allegiance. Livy's pages accordingly were to him the record of the great deeds of his forefathers. He studied them with the utmost eagerness.

Under the influence of one or the other of these two passions, the thirst for new truth and beauty and the love of the past, or of both of them in conjunction, Petrarch laboured strenuously, until he had gathered together from a

[1] Petrarch sometimes applies this method of criticism more wisely and with better results. *Cf. Fam.*, xiv., 1 (vol. ii., pp. 268, 269).

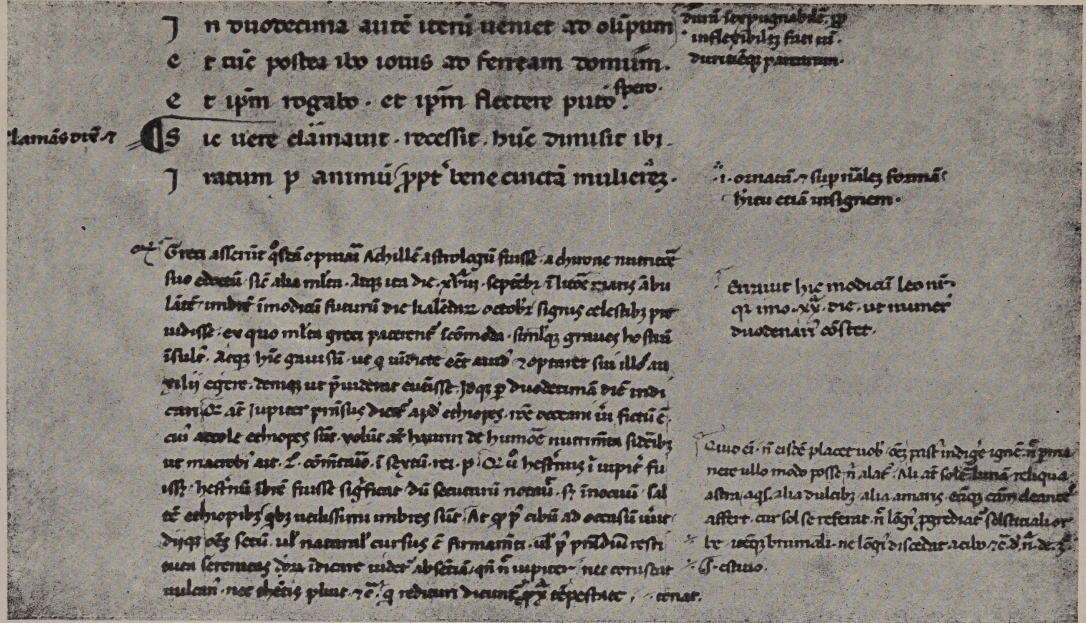
hundred obscure sources all the remains of Roman literature that were obtainable in his day, and had made himself familiar with them. Greek literature, unfortunately, it was impossible for him to know. In spite of a lifelong desire, and at least one determined effort, he was unable to acquire even a rudimentary knowledge of the Greek language.[1] He read in barren Latin translations more or less of Plato and Aristotle and Homer, but this could afford him nothing like an adequate conception of the power and beauty of the literature as a whole. It is a sad pity that he was so handicapped, for if the first Humanist had known and appreciated Homer and Plato and Sophocles, as he did Cicero and Virgil and Seneca and Livy, all our modern culture would be something far finer. We should be simpler and clearer in our conceptions, and better developed æsthetically. If Hellenic influences have never played their due part in our education, if the proportion between the Greek and the Roman elements has been unnatural, this is owing mainly to the insufficient opportunities of Petrarch and his earliest disciples.

[1] There was no apparatus for the study of Greek at that time. Oral instruction from Greek or Byzantine scholars was the only possible means of access to the great writers of the past. Such instruction was difficult to secure, as Petrarch's efforts and failure prove.

To the classical authors that he did possess he devoted a prolonged and intense study that has very rarely been equalled. He followed faithfully his own injunctions given in the *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ:* "If you would win glory from your books you must know them, and not merely have them; must stow them away, not in your library, but in your memory, not in your bookcases, but in your brain." Annotations in his hand on the manuscripts that have been traced back to him[1] show that he weighed with care every word of his favourite writers. But external evidence like this is not necessary. Every page of his letters, and of all his other Latin writings too, is proof in itself that as far as his limitations permitted he had absorbed the very spirit of his beloved classics.

The letters show also how eager he was to hand on to others the light that he had gained from these studies. He had as wide and varied an acquaintance as any man of his time, thanks to the fame that he had won in his youth by his verses, and to the attraction that he exercised upon everyone in later life, through his personal charm and his remarkable intellectual powers; and one of the inevitable consequences of such a connection was a correspondence that

[1] Through the patience and ingenuity of M. de Nolhac.



A PAGE FROM PETRARCH'S COPY OF THE "ILIAD."

was both active and large. He wrote to the emperor and the pope, to kings and their regents, to churchmen of every degree, to scholars in almost all parts of Europe, to men of every profession, every age, every taste; and he wrote always as a Humanist, a lover of the classics, who found in them the quintessence of human wisdom. Men everywhere were ready for broader views, deeper knowledge, keener life, and he, through these letters and through personal contact, stimulated their longing and showed them where they might find that which would satisfy it. The influence that he thus exerted is incalculable. This volume is but an effort to give some comprehension of it.

Of the letters that follow the first four are given for the sake of showing the range and quality of Petrarch's classical scholarship. They are taken, with one exception, from the letters to dead authors, which constitute a large part of the twenty-fourth book of the *Familiares*. The first is addressed to Cicero.

To Marcus Tullius Cicero.[1]

Your letters I sought for long and diligently; and finally, where I least expected it, I found them. At once I read them, over and over, with the utmost

[1] *Fam.*, xxiv., 3. This epistle was written very soon after Petrarch's discovery, at Verona, of the *Letters to Atticus and Quintus*

eagerness. And as I read I seemed to hear your bodily voice, O Marcus Tullius, saying many things, uttering many lamentations, ranging through many phases of thought and feeling. I long had known how excellent a guide you have proved for others; at last I was to learn what sort of guidance you gave yourself.

Now it is your turn to be the listener. Hearken, wherever you are, to the words of advice, or rather of sorrow and regret, that fall, not unaccompanied by tears, from the lips of one of your successors, who loves you faithfully and cherishes your name. O spirit ever restless and perturbed! in old age—I am but using your own words—self-involved in calamities and ruin! what good could you think would come from your incessant wrangling, from all this wasteful strife and enmity? Where were the peace and quiet that befitted your years, your profession, your station in life? What Will-o'-the-wisp tempted you away, with a delusive hope of glory; involved you, in your declining years, in the wars of younger men; and, after exposing you to every form of misfortune, hurled you down to a death that it was unseemly for a philosopher to die? Alas! the wise counsel that you gave your brother, and the salutary advice of your great masters, you

and the *Correspondence with Brutus*, known collectively as the *Letters addressed to Atticus*. It undoubtedly gives us the impressions derived from the first eager perusal of these.

It will be observed that Petrarch is less at his ease here than in his ordinary correspondence. One feels in all his letters to the great men of the past a certain constraint. He was awe-struck, and his style consequently is a little self-conscious and laboured.

forgot. You were like a traveller in the night, whose torch lights up for others the path where he himself has miserably fallen.

Of Dionysius I forbear to speak; of your brother and nephew, too; of Dolabella even, if you like. At one moment you praise them all to the skies; at the next fall upon them with sudden maledictions. This, however, could perhaps be pardoned. I will pass by Julius Cæsar, too, whose well-approved clemency was a harbour of refuge for the very men who were warring against him. Great Pompey, likewise, I refrain from mentioning. His affection for you was such that you could do with him what you would. But what insanity led you to hurl yourself upon Antony? Love of the republic, you would probably say. But the republic had fallen before this into irretrievable ruin, as you had yourself admitted. Still, it is possible that a lofty sense of duty, and love of liberty, constrained you to do as you did, hopeless though the effort was. That we can easily believe of so great a man. But why, then, were you so friendly with Augustus? What answer can you give to Brutus? If you accept Octavius, said he, we must conclude that you are not so anxious to be rid of all tyrants as to find a tyrant who will be well-disposed toward yourself. Now, unhappy man, you were to take the last false step, the last and most deplorable. You began to speak ill of the very friend whom you had so lauded, although he was not doing any ill to you, but merely refusing to prevent others who were. I grieve, dear friend, at such fickleness. These shortcomings fill

me with pity and shame. Like Brutus, I feel no confidence in the arts in which you are so proficient. What, pray, does it profit a man to teach others, and to be prating always about virtue, in high-sounding words, if he fails to give heed to his own instructions? Ah! how much better it would have been, how much more fitting for a philosopher, to have grown old peacefully in the country, meditating, as you yourself have somewhere said, upon the life that endures for ever, and not upon this poor fragment of life; to have known no fasces, yearned for no triumphs, found no Catilines to fill the soul with ambitious longings!—All this, however, is vain. Farewell, forever, my Cicero.

Written in the land of the living; on the right bank of the Adige, in Verona, a city of Transpadane Italy; on the 16th of June, and in the year of that God whom you never knew the 1345th.

With that should go the following interesting little account of a controversy between Petrarch and a certain aged scholar whom he met in the course of one of his journeys. Nothing could afford a clearer insight into either the nature of Petrarch's own feeling for the classics or the general humanistic conditions of the time. This is one of the letters, as the opening sentences show, that were carefully revised for the public.

The Old Grammarian of Vicenza.

To Pulice di Vicenza.[1]

On my way I stopped overnight in one of Vicenza's suburbs, and there I found something new to write about. It happened that I had left Padua not much before noon, and so did not reach the outskirts of your city until the sun was getting low. I tried to make up my mind whether I had better put up there or push on a little farther; for I was in a hurry, and the days are long now, and it would be light for a good while yet. I was still hesitating, when lo!—for who can remain hidden from the friends who love him?—all my doubts were happily resolved by your arrival, in company with several other men of mark, such as that little city has always produced in great abundance. My mind was tossing this way and that, but you and your companions, with your pleasant varied talk, furnished the cable that bound it fast. I planned to go, but still stayed on; and did not realise that the daylight was slipping away from me until night was actually at hand. So I discovered once again what I had observed often before, that there is nothing that filches time away from us, without our perceiving it, like converse with our friends. They are the greatest of all thieves of time. And yet we ought to deem no time less truly stolen from us, less truly lost out of our lives, than such as is expended (next to God) upon them.

[1] *Fam.*, xxiv., 2.

Well, not to review the story at too great length, you remember that some one made mention of Cicero, as will very often happen among men of literary tastes. This name at once brought our desultory conversation to an end. We all turned our thoughts toward him. Nothing but Cicero was discussed after that. As we sat and feasted together we vied with one another in singing his praises. Still, there is nothing in this world that is absolutely perfect; never has the man existed in whom the critic, were he ever so lenient, would see nothing at all to reprehend. So it chanced that while I expressed admiration for Cicero, almost without reservation, as a man whom I loved and honoured above all others, and amazement too at his golden eloquence and his heavenly genius, I found at the same time a little fault with his fickleness and inconsistency, traits that are revealed everywhere in his life and works. At once I saw that all who were present were astonished at so unusual an opinion, and one among them especially so. I refer to the old man, your fellow-citizen, whose name has gone from me, although his image is fresh in my memory, and I revere him, both for his years and for his scholarship.

Well, the circumstances seemed to demand that I fetch the manuscript of my correspondence with my friends, which I had with me in my chest. It was brought in, and added fuel to the flame. For among the letters that were written to my contemporaries there are a few, inserted with an eye to variety and for the sake of a little diversion

in the midst of my more serious labours, that are addressed to some of the more illustrious men of ancient times. A reader who was not forewarned would be amazed at these, finding names so old and of such renown mingled with those of our own day. Two of them are to Cicero himself; one criticising his character, the other praising his genius. These two you read, while the others listened; and then the strife of words grew warmer. Some approved of what I had written, admitting that Cicero deserved my censure. But the old man stood his ground, more stubbornly even than before. He was so blinded by love of his hero and by the brightness of his name that he preferred to praise him even when he was in the wrong; to embrace faults and virtues together, rather than make any exceptions. He would not be thought to condemn anything at all in so great a man. So instead of answering our arguments he rang the changes again and again upon the splendour of Cicero's fame, letting authority usurp the place of reason. He would stretch out his hand and say imploringly, "Gently, I beg of you, gently with my Cicero." And when we asked him if he found it impossible to believe that Cicero had made mistakes, he would close his eyes and turn his face away and exclaim with a groan, as if he had been smitten, "Alas! alas! Is my beloved Cicero accused of doing wrong?" just as if we were speaking not of a man but of some god. I asked him, accordingly, whether in his opinion Tullius was a god, or a man like others. "A god," he replied; and then, realising what he had said, he added, "a god of elo-

quence." "Oh, very well!" I answered; "if he is a god, he certainly could not have erred. However, I never heard him styled so before. And yet, if Cicero calls Plato his god, why should not you in turn speak of Cicero as yours?—except that it is not in harmony with our religious beliefs for men to fashion gods for themselves as they may fancy." "I am only jesting," said he; "I know that Tullius was a man, but he was a man of godlike genius." "That is better," I responded; "for when Quintilian called him heavenly he spoke no more than the truth. But then, if you admit that he was a man, it follows necessarily that he could make mistakes, and did so." As I spoke these words he shuddered and turned away, as if they were aimed not at another man's reputation but at his own life. What could I say, I who am myself so great an admirer of Cicero's genius? I felt that the old scholar was to be envied for his ardour and devotion, which had something of the Pythagorean savour. I was rejoiced at finding such reverence for even one great man; such almost religious regard, so fervent that to suspect any touch of human weakness in its object seemed like sacrilege. I was amazed, too, at having discovered a person who cherished a love greater than mine for the man whom I always had loved beyond all others; a person who in old age still held, deeply rooted in his heart, the opinions concerning him which I remember to have entertained in my boyhood; and who, notwithstanding his advanced years, was incapable of arguing that if Cicero was a man it followed that in some cases, in

many indeed, he must have erred, a conclusion that I have been forced, by common sense and by knowledge of his life, to accept at this earlier stage of my development, — although this conviction does not alter the fact that the beauty of his work delights me still, beyond that of any other writer. Why, Tullius himself, the very man of whom we are speaking, took this view, for he often bewailed his errors, bitterly. If, in our eagerness to praise him, we deny that he thus understood himself, we deprive him of a large part of his renown as a philosopher, the praise, namely, that is due to self-knowledge and modesty.

To return, however, to that day; after a long discussion we were compelled by the lateness of the hour to desist, and separated with the question still unsettled. But as we parted you asked me to send you from my first resting-place, inasmuch as the shortness of the time would not let me attend to it just then, a copy of each of these letters of mine, in order that you might look into the matter a little more carefully, and be in a position to act as a mediator between the parties, or, possibly, as a champion of Cicero's steadfastness and consistency. I approve of your intention, and send the copies herewith. I do so, strange to say, with a fear that I may be victorious, and a hope that I may be vanquished. And one thing more: I must tell you that if you do prove the victor you have a larger task on your hands than you now imagine. For Annæus Seneca, whom I criticise in my very next letter in a similar way, insists that you act as his champion too.

I have dealt familiarly with these great geniuses, and perhaps boldly, but lovingly, but sorrowfully, but truthfully, I think[1]; with somewhat more of truthfulness, in fact, than I myself relish. There are many things in both of them that delight me, only a few that trouble me. Of these few I felt constrained to write; perhaps to-day I should feel otherwise. For, although I have grouped these letters together at the end, it is only because their subject-matter is so unlike the others; they came from the anvil long ago.

The fact is, I still grieve over the fate of these great men; but I do not lament their faults any the less because of that. Furthermore, I beg you to note that I say nothing against Seneca's private life, nor against Cicero's attitude toward the state. Do not confuse the two cases. It is Cicero alone whom we are discussing now; and I am not forgetting that he as consul was vigilant and patriotic, and cured the disease from which the republic was suffering; nor that as a private citizen he always loved his country faithfully. But what of his fickleness in friendship; and his bitter quarrels upon slight provocation,—quarrels that brought ruin upon himself and good to no one; and his inability to understand his own position and the condition of the republic, so unlike his usual acumen; and, finally, the spectacle of a philosopher, in his old age, childishly fond of useless wrangling? These things I cannot praise. And remember that they are things concerning

[1] This artificial repetition of the adversative conjunction is a trick of style that Petrarch is very fond of.

which no unbiassed judgment can be formed, by you or anyone else, without a careful reading of the entire correspondence of Cicero, which suggested this controversy.[1]

May 13th, *en route*.

Of the two letters addressed directly to Cicero himself, and referred to in the preceding epistle, one has already been given. The other is, in part, as follows:

To Marcus Tullius Cicero.[2]

If my earlier letter gave you offence,—for, as you often have remarked, the saying of your contemporary in the *Andria* is a faithful one, that compliance begets friends, truth only hatred,—you shall listen now to words that will soothe your wounded feelings and prove that the truth need not always be hateful. For, if censure that is true angers us, true praise, on the other hand, gives us delight.

You lived then, Cicero, if I may be permitted to say it, like a mere man, but spoke like an orator, wrote like a philosopher. It was your life that I criticised; not your mind, nor your tongue; for the one fills me with admiration, the other with amazement. And even in your life I feel the lack of nothing but stability, and the love of quiet that should go with your philosophic professions, and abstention from

[1] This last sentence, with its schoolmasterly tone, is an interesting revelation of Petrarch's feeling of superiority, in point of scholarship, to all of his associates. It was a feeling that the facts fully justified.

[2] *Fam.*, xxiv., 4.

civil war, when liberty had been extinguished and the republic buried and its dirge sung.

See how different my treatment of you is from yours of Epicurus, in your works at large, and especially in the *De Finibus*. You are continually praising his life, but his talents you ridicule. I ridicule in you nothing at all. Your life does awaken my pity, as I have said; but your talents and your eloquence call for nothing but congratulation. O great father of Roman eloquence! not I alone but all who deck themselves with the flowers of Latin speech render thanks unto you. It is from your well-springs that we draw the streams that water our meads. You, we freely acknowledge, are the leader who marshals us; yours are the words of encouragement that sustain us; yours is the light that illumines the path before us. In a word, it is under your auspices that we have attained to such little skill in this art of writing as we may possess. . . .

You have heard what I think of your life and your genius. Are you hoping to hear of your books also; what fate has befallen them, how they are esteemed by the masses and among scholars? They still are in existence, glorious volumes, but we of to-day are too feeble a folk to read them, or even to be acquainted with their mere titles. Your fame extends far and wide; your name is mighty, and fills the ears of men; and yet those who really know you are very few, be it because the times are unfavourable, or because men's minds are slow and dull, or, as I am the more inclined to believe, because the love of

money forces our thoughts in other directions. Consequently right in our own day, unless I am much mistaken, some of your books have disappeared, I fear beyond recovery. It is a great grief to me, a great disgrace to this generation, a great wrong done to posterity. The shame of failing to cultivate our own talents, thereby depriving the future of the fruits that they might have yielded, is not enough for us ; we must waste and spoil, through our cruel and insufferable neglect, the fruits of your labours too, and of those of your fellows as well, for the fate that I lament in the case of your own books has befallen the works of many another illustrious man.

It is of yours alone, though, that I would speak now. Here are the names of those among them whose loss is most to be deplored: the *Republic*, the *Praise of Philosophy*, the treatises on the *Care of Property*, on the *Art of War*, on *Consolation*, on *Glory*,—although in the case of this last my feeling is rather one of hopeful uncertainty than of certain despair. And then there are huge gaps in the volumes that have survived. It is as if indolence and oblivion had been worsted, in a great battle, but we had to mourn noble leaders slain, and others lost or maimed. This last indignity very many of your books have suffered, but more particularly the *Orator*, the *Academics*, and the *Laws*. They have come forth from the fray so mutilated and disfigured that it would have been better if they had perished outright.

Now, in conclusion, you will wish me to tell you something about the condition of Rome and the

Roman republic: the present appearance of the city and whole country, the degree of harmony that prevails, what classes of citizens possess political power, by whose hands and with what wisdom the reins of empire are swayed, and whether the Danube, the Ganges, the Ebro, the Nile, the Don, are our boundaries now, or in very truth the man has arisen who ' bounds our empire by the ocean-stream, our fame by the stars of heaven,' or ' extends our rule beyond Garama and Ind,' as your friend the Mantuan has said. Of these and other matters of like nature I doubt not you would very gladly hear. Your filial piety tells me so, your well-known love of country, which you cherished even to your own destruction. But indeed it were better that I refrained. Trust me, Cicero, if you were to hear of our condition to-day you would be moved to tears, in whatever circle of heaven above, or Erebus below, you may be dwelling. Farewell, forever.

Written in the world of the living; on the left bank of the Rhone, in Transalpine Gaul; in the same year, but in the month of December, the 19th day.

Over against the foregoing should be placed a part at least of the long letter addressed to Homer. This will serve to correct the somewhat too favourable impression of Petrarch's critical insight that the letters to Cicero may have induced, and will reveal some of the limitations of his scholarship.

To Homer.[1]

Long before your letter[2] reached me I had formed an intention of writing to you, and I should really have done it if it had not been for the lack of a common language. I am not so fortunate as to have learned Greek,[3] and the Latin tongue, which you once spoke, by the aid of our writers,[4] you seem of late, through the negligence of their successors, to have quite forgotten. From both avenues of communication, consequently, I have been debarred, and so have kept silence. But now there comes a man[5] who restores you to us, single-handed, and makes you a Latin again.

Your Penelope cannot have waited longer nor

[1] *Fam.*, xxiv., 12.

[2] Someone had sent Petrarch an epistle that purported to come from the shade of Homer. It must have been even more interesting than this reply, in its unconscious revelation of mediæval limitations. Petrarch took it very seriously. He often forgets in this answer that he is not writing to Homer himself.

[3] In Petrarch's day, as has been hinted above (p. 237), there was no apparatus for the study of Greek. Oral instruction, from Greek or Byzantine scholars, was the only possible means of access to the great writers of the past. Such instruction was very difficult to secure, as Petrarch's repeated efforts and final failure prove. For his own statements concerning this subject see *Fam.*, xviii., 2.

[4] The reference is of course to the Latin translations of Homer, the *Odyssey* of Livius Andronicus and the abridgment of the *Iliad* mentioned just below, p. 254, note 1.

[5] Leo Pilatus (or Leontius Pilatus, as Boccaccio writes the name), a Calabrian, who, at the instance of Petrarch and Boccaccio, was making at Florence at about this time a Latin prose version of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. For a good brief account of what is known concerning Pilatus, with a few specimens of his translation, see Körting, *op. cit.*, i., 474 *sqq.*

with more eager expectation for her Ulysses than I did for you. At last, though, my hope was fading gradually away. Except for a few of the opening lines of certain books, from which there seemed to flash upon me the face of the friend whom I had been longing to behold, a momentary glimpse, dim through distance, or, rather, the sight of his streaming hair, as he vanished from my view,—except for this no hint of a Latin Homer had come to me, and I had no hope of being able ever to see you face to face. For as regards the little book that is circulated under your name, while I cannot say whose it is I do feel sure that it is yours only as it has been culled from you and accredited to you, and is not your real work at all.[1] This friend of ours, however, if he lives, will restore you to us in your entirety. He is now at work, and we are beginning to enjoy not only the treasures of wisdom that are stored away in your divine poems but also the sweetness and charm of your speech. One fragment has come to my hands already, Grecian precious ointment in Latin vessels.[2] . . .

To turn now to details, I am very eager for knowledge, and consequently was delighted be-

[1] The reference here is to the metrical abridgment of the *Iliad* by Silius Italicus. This contains 1070 lines, half of them condensed translation of passages from books I.–V., the remainder little more than the driest epitome. Poor as it is, it was widely accepted in the middle ages, in some confused sort of a way, as 'Homer.' But Petrarch was able to look below the surface and see just what it was.

[2] De Nolhac has shown (*op. cit.*, pp. 342, 354) that Pilatus probably had made for Petrarch alone, more than a year before this epistle was written, a preliminary translation of the first five books of the *Iliad*.

yond all measure and belief by what you wrote about your instructors, of whom I had never before heard, although now I shall reverence them because of the merits of their great pupil; and about the origin of poetry, which you explain at the greatest length; and about the earliest followers of the Muses, among whom, in addition to the well-known dwellers upon Helicon, you place Cadmus, the son of Agenor, and a certain Hercules, whether the great Alcides or not I do not fully understand; and, finally, about the place of your nativity, concerning which there used to be very vague and misty views here in my country, and no great clearness, so far as I can see, among your compatriots; about your wanderings, too, in search of knowledge, into Phœnicia and Egypt, whither, several centuries after you, the illustrious philosophers Pythagoras and Plato also made their way, and the Athenian law-giver who in his late years wooed the Pierian Muses, wise old Solon, who while he lived never ceased to admire you, and when he died doubtless became one of your cherished friends; and, last of all, about the number of your works, the majority of which even the Italians, your nearest neighbours, have never so much as heard of. As for the barbarians, who bound us upon two sides, and from whom I would that we were separated not by lofty Alps alone but by the whole wide sea as well, they scarcely have heard— I will not say of your books, but even of your very name. You see how trivial a thing is this wonderful fame which we mortals sigh for so windily. . .

And now what shall I say about the matter of imitation? When you found yourself soaring so high on the wings of genius you ought to have foreseen that you would always have imitators. You should be glad that your endowments are such that many men long to be like you, although not many can succeed. Why not be glad, you who are sure of holding always the first place, when I, the least of mortals, am more than glad, am in fact puffed up with pride, because I have grown great enough for others—though I scarcely can believe that this is really true—to desire to imitate and copy me? In my case the pride and joy would only increase if among these imitators there should be found some few who were capable of surpassing me. I pray—not your Apollo, but the true God of Intellect whom I worship, to crown the efforts of all who may deem it worth their while to follow after me, and to grant that they may find it an easy thing to come up with me, and outstrip me too. . . .

But I am wandering. It was my intention to speak to you of Virgil, than whom, as Flaccus says, this earth has produced no soul more spotless; and to suggest to you, great master of us both, certain excuses for his conduct. . . . I admit the truth of everything that you say concerning him, but it does not necessarily follow that I lend a sympathetic ear to the charges that you base upon this failure of his to make anywhere any mention of your name, laden and bedecked though he is with your spoils,—mention, you remind me, such as Lucan made, remembering in grateful strains the honour due to Smyrna's bard.

Far from that, I am even going to suggest to you additional cause for complaint. Flaccus also remembers you, in many a passage, and always with the highest praise. In one place he exalts you above the very philosophers; in another he assigns to you the highest seat among the poets. Naso remembers you too, and Juvenal, and Statius. But why try to mention all who mention Homer? There is scarcely one of our writers but that belongs in that class. Why is it then, you will say, that I find the one man from whom I deserved most gratitude proving so utterly ungrateful? Before I answer you let me furnish you still another reason for complaint. Observe that he was not equally ungrateful in every case. Musæus and Linus and Orpheus are referred to more than once. So also, and with even greater humility, Hesiod the Ascræan and Theocritus of Syracuse. And finally, a thing that he never would have done if he had had any touch of jealousy, he takes pains to speak of Varus, and Gallus, and certain others of his contemporaries.

Well, have I aggravated sufficiently the resentment which I proposed to assuage, or entirely remove? The natural conclusion, certainly, for anyone to draw, if this were all that I had to say. But it is not; we have not considered yet the reasons for all this, and given them their due weight, and that we should always do, especially when we are sitting in judgment upon others.

Is it not true, then, that he chose Theocritus for his guide and model in the Bucolics, and Hesiod in the Georgics, and, having done so, took pains to intro-

duce the name of each in its appropriate place? Yes, you will say; but after choosing me for his third model, in his heroic poem, what was there to prevent his making some mention there, in like manner, of my name? He would have done so, believe me, for he was the gentlest and most unassuming of men, as is proved by all that is written of him and all that we know of his daily life; but impious death forbade. The others he had referred to wherever he thought of it or found it convenient; for you, to whom he owed so much more, he was reserving a place that had been determined not by mere chance but by the most careful consideration. And what place, think you? What but the most prominent and conspicuous of all? The end of his glorious work!—it was for that that he was waiting; it was there that he was intending to exalt you and your name to the stars in resounding verse, and to hail you as his leader. What better place to praise a leader than at the journey's end? You have good reason, then, for lamenting his too early death, and so has the whole Italian world; but for reproaching your friend, none whatever. . . . .

Now, in conclusion, I must run over the various little complaints that are scattered up and down the whole length of your letter. You grieve because you have been mangled so by your imitators. But do you not see that it could not possibly have been otherwise? No one could deal comprehensively with so great a genius. Then you mourn because your name, which was held in great honour by the lawyers and physicians of old, is despised by

their successors of to-day. But you forget that these professions are filled now by men of a very different stamp from those who followed them in former times. If they were of the same sort they would love and cherish the same things. So put away your indignation and your grief, and be of good hope; for to have gained the disfavour of the evil and the ignorant is to have given sure sign of virtue and genius. . . .

A word now with reference to your complaint that the valley of Fiesole and the banks of the Arno can furnish only three men who know you and love you. You ought not to wonder at this. It is enough; indeed, it is a very great deal, more than I should have expected, to discover three Pierian spirits in a city so entirely given up to gain. But even if you think otherwise you need not be discouraged; it is a large and populous place, and if you seek you will find there a fourth. And to these four I could once have added a fifth, a man who well deserves to be honoured thus, for the laurels of Peneus bind his brow—or of Alpheus rather. But alas! the great Babylon beyond the Alps has contrived to steal him away from us. To find five such men at one time and in one city, is that, think you, a little thing? Search through other cities. Your beloved Bologna that you sigh for,[1] hospitable though she is to all who are of studious mind, has yet but one

[1] Voigt argues from these words that the letter to which this of Petrarch's is a reply came from Bologna. De Nolhac thinks it more probable that it was written from Florence, by Boccaccio and his friends.

such person, though you seek in every corner and crevice. Verona has two; Solmona one; and Mantua one, if the heavens have not tempted him quite away from the things of earth, for he has left your banner and enlisted under that of Ptolemy. Rome herself, the capital of the world, has been drained of such citizens almost to a man, strange though it seems. Perugia did produce one, a man who might have made a name for himself; but he has neglected his opportunities, and turned his back not on Parnassus only but on our Apennines and Alps as well, and now, in old age, is leading a vagabond life, in Spain, toiling as a copyist to earn his daily bread. And other cities have given birth to others, but all of these whom I have known have before now left this mortal home and migrated to that continuing city which one day shall receive us all. . . .

For a long while I have been talking to you just as if you were present; but now the strong illusion fades away, and I realise how far you are from me. There comes over me a fear that you will scarcely care, down in the shades, to read the many things that I have written here. Yet I remember that you wrote freely to me.

And now farewell, forever. To Orpheus, and Linus, and Euripides, and all the others, I beg you to give my kindest greetings, when you come again to your abode.

Written in the world above; in the *Midland* between the famous rivers Po and Ticino and Adda and others, whence some say our *Milan* derives its

name; on the ninth day of October, in the year of this last age of the world the 1360th.

With this, as throwing further light upon Petrarch's limitations, may be placed the letter to his brother, upon the nature of poetry, to which reference was made above in discussing the question of allegory:

On the Nature of Poetry.

To his Brother Gherardo.[1]

I judge, from what I know of your religious fervour, that you will feel a sort of repugnance toward the poem which I enclose in this letter, deeming it quite out of harmony with all your professions, and in direct opposition to your whole mode of thinking and living. But you must not be too hasty in your conclusions. What can be more foolish than to pronounce an opinion upon a subject that you have not investigated? The fact is, poetry is very far from being opposed to theology. Does that surprise you? One may almost say that theology actually is poetry, poetry concerning God. To call Christ now a lion, now a lamb, now a worm, what pray is that if not poetical? And you will find thousands of such things in the Scriptures, so very many that I cannot attempt to enumerate them. What indeed are the parables of our Saviour, in the Gospels, but words whose sound is foreign to their

[1] *Fam.*, x., 4.

sense, or allegories, to use the technical term ? But allegory is the very warp and woof of all poetry. Of course, though, the subject matter in the two cases is very different. That everyone will admit. In the one case it is God and things pertaining to him that are treated, in the other mere gods and mortal men.

Now we can see how Aristotle came to say that the first theologians and the first poets were one and the same. The very name of poet is proof that he was right. Inquiries have been made into the origin of that word; and, although the theories have varied somewhat, the most reasonable view on the whole is this: that in early days, when men were rude and unformed, but full of a burning desire—which is part of our very nature—to know the truth, and especially to learn about God, they began to feel sure that there really is some higher power that controls our destinies, and to deem it fitting that homage should be paid to this power, with all manner of reverence beyond that which is ever shown to men, and also with an august ceremonial. Therefore, just as they planned for grand abodes, which they called temples, and for consecrated servants, to whom they gave the name of priests, and for magnificent statues, and vessels of gold, and marble tables, and purple vestments, they also determined, in order that this feeling of homage might not remain unexpressed, to strive to win the favour of the deity by lofty words, subjecting the powers above to the softening influences of songs of praise, sacred hymns remote from all the forms of speech that

pertain to common usage and to the affairs of state, and embellished moreover by numbers, which add a charm and drive tedium away. It behoved of course that this be done not in every-day fashion, but in a manner artful and carefully elaborated and a little strange. Now speech which was thus heightened was called in Greek *poetices;* so, very naturally, those who used it came to be called *poets.*

Who, you will ask, is my authority for this ? But can you not dispense with bondsmen, my brother, and have a little faith in me ? That you should trust my unsupported word, when I tell you things that are true and bear upon their face the stamp of truth, is nothing more, it seems to me, than I have a right to ask of you. Still, if you find yourself disposed to proceed more cautiously, I will give you bondsmen who are perfectly good, witnesses whom you may trust with perfect safety. The first of these is Marcus Varro, the greatest scholar that Rome ever produced, and the next is Tranquillus, an investigator whose work is characterised always by the utmost caution. Then I can add a third name, which will probably be better known to you, Isidore. He too mentions these matters, in the eighth book of his *Etymologies,* although briefly and merely on the authority of Tranquillus.

But you will object, and say, " I certainly can believe the saint, if not the other learned men; and yet the fact remains that the sweetness of your poetry is inconsistent with the severity of my life." Ah! but you are mistaken, my brother. Why, even the Old Testament fathers made use of

poetry, both heroic song and other kinds. Moses, for example, and Job, and David, and Solomon, and Jeremiah. Even the psalms, which you are always singing, day and night, are in metre, in the Hebrew; so that I should be guilty of no inaccuracy or impropriety if I ventured to style their author the Christian's poet. Indeed the plain facts of the case inevitably suggest some such designation. Let me remind you, moreover, since you are not inclined to take anything that I say to-day without authority, that even Jerome took this view of the matter. Of course these sacred poems, these psalms, which sing of the blessed man, Christ,—of his birth, his death, his descent into hell, his resurrection, his ascent into heaven, his return to judge the earth,—never have been, and never could have been, translated into another language without some sacrifice of either the metre or the sense. So, as the choice had to be made, it has been the sense that has been considered. And yet some vestige of metrical law still survives, and the separate fragments we still call verses, very properly, for verses they are.

So much for the ancients. Now as regards Ambrose and Augustine and Jerome, our guides through the New Testament,—to show that they too employed poetic forms and rhythms would be the easiest of tasks; while in the case of Prudentius and Prosper and Sedulius and the rest the mere names are enough, for we have not a single word from them in prose, while their metrical productions are numerous and well known. Do not look askance then, dear brother, upon a practice which you see

has been approved by saintly men whom Christ has loved. Consider the underlying meaning alone, and if that is sound and true accept it gladly, no matter what the outward form may be. To praise a feast set forth on earthen vessels but despise it when it is served on gold is too much like madness or hypocrisy. . . .

But enough of preface, and of apology for form and style. Let me come to the point, without further explanation. You must know that three summers ago, when I was in Gaul, the heat drove me to the Fountain of the Sorgue, which we once fixed upon, you will remember, as the place where we would pass our life. By the grace of God, however, a far more safe and tranquil abode was being prepared for you; while I was to be denied the enjoyment of even the little tranquillity that would have been possible there, since fortune was planning to raise me to a much higher station, very little to my liking.

Well, here I was, with my mind divided, afraid to undertake a task of any magnitude while I was under such a burden of care, and yet quite unable to be altogether idle, because I have been nourished from my infancy on activity, an activity which I hope has been praiseworthy, but which I know has been incessant. So I chose a middle course, postponing all work that was of much importance but doing little odds and ends of writing, trifles that would help me pass away the time. Now the very nature of the region, the forest recesses to which the coming of dawn made me long to flee and forget

my cares, and from which only the return of night could bring me home, suggested that I sing a woodland strain. Accordingly I began to compose a pastoral poem, in twelve eclogues, a thing that I had long had in mind; and you would scarcely believe me if I told you in how few days I had it all completed, under the stimulus of the place.

Now the first of these eclogues, in accordance with the intention that I had all along entertained, was about our two selves. Consequently it has won the distinction of being chosen to be sent to you; whether with the result of giving you pleasure or of completely spoiling all your pleasure I scarcely can decide. But that is neither here nor there. In either case this kind of poetry is one that cannot be understood unless a key to it is furnished by the person who constructed it. So, as I would not have you weary yourself to no purpose, I must give you a brief outline, first of what I say, then of what I mean by it.

Two shepherds are introduced, for it is of the pastoral style. Pastoral names are given them, naturally: Silvius and Monicus. Silvius, seeing Monicus lying all alone in a cave, happy and at his ease, envies him and speaks to him, expressing amazement at his good fortune, and lamenting his own estate. Monicus may forget his flocks and fields, and think of rest alone, while he must make his painful way over the rough hills. He marvels the more at this great difference in their lot from the fact that, as he expresses it, one and the same mother bore them both,—so that we may under-

stand that they are brothers. Monicus, in response, throws all the blame for this hard life on Silvius himself, saying that he is under no constraint whatever, but is wandering of his own free will through the trackless forests and over the mountain summits. Silvius replies that there is a reason for these wanderings; the reason is love, nothing less than love of the Muse. To make this clear he begins a rather long story of two shepherds, who sing very sweetly. He tells how he heard one of them in his boyhood, and afterwards the other, and was so captivated by them that he began to neglect everything else. He has been following them eagerly through the mountains, and while doing so has learned to sing, with a skill that others have praised, although he himself is not yet satisfied with it; and he intends to struggle on toward the summit, and either reach it or perish in the attempt.

Monicus now begins to urge Silvius to come into the cave, for he will hear there even sweeter singing. Presently, though, he breaks off, suddenly, as if he saw signs of agitation in the other's face. Silvius, however, offers some excuse, and Monicus continues. When he has finished, Silvius asks who this shepherd is that sings so sweetly; never before has he heard him mentioned. Thereupon Monicus, in the roundabout way that would be natural in an artless shepherd, instead of giving his name describes the land of his birth, making mention, after the fashion of rustics, who often wander in telling a story, of two rivers that spring from one source. Then immediately, as if he saw that he had made a mistake, he

turns his words round, and where he had begun to speak of two rivers he goes on to tell of one, which flows from two sources. Both of these are in Asia. Silvius declares that he knows this river, citing in confirmation the fact that a certain youth who goes clad in hairy raiment bathes Apollo in it. In that region, continues Monicus, a singer has arisen. Silvius, upon hearing these words, remembers that he has heard of this man, and proceeds to speak slightingly of his voice and mode of singing, exalting his own by comparison. But Monicus objects, and heaps upon the far-away singer well-deserved praise. Thereupon Silvius after a time pretends to acquiesce, and says that later he will return and test the sweetness of these songs; now he must hurry away. Monicus, wondering at this, begs to know the reason of his haste, and learns that Silvius is intent upon a song of his own which he has begun to compose, concerning a certain famous youth whose deeds he is briefly reviewing, and that he consequently has no leisure now for other things. Monicus accordingly brings the conversation to an end. He bids Silvius good-bye, concluding with an earnest exhortation to weigh well the dangers and chances of such delay. And there you have the sum and substance of the narrative.

Now as to its meaning. The shepherds who converse are ourselves. I am Silvius, you are Monicus. These names are chosen for the following reasons: the former, partly because the scene of the eclogue is of a sylvan character, partly because I always have felt, from my earliest childhood, a hatred of

cities, implanted in me by nature, and a love of sylvan life, which has led many of our friends to style me Sylvanus much more frequently than Francesco. Then the other name comes from the fact that there was one of the Cyclops who was called Monicus, that is to say, one-eyed, and there seemed a certain fitness in applying the name to you, since of the two eyes which we mortals all use, one to behold heavenly things and the other those of the earth, you have cast away that which looks earthward and are content to employ the nobler one alone.

The cave, where Monicus dwells in solitude, is Montrieux, where you are living your life in the midst of grottoes and woods. Or it may be taken for the very cave of Mary Magdalene, close by your monastery, the place where she passed her period of penitence, and where God lent the props of his grace to your vacillating heart and made you steadfast in the holy purpose which you had so often discussed with me.

For flocks and fields, which you are said to care for no longer, understand your fellow-men and their haunts, which you abandoned when you fled away into solitude. The statement that we had one and the same mother, and father too for that matter, is not allegory but naked truth. The word sepulchre [1] is to be taken as referring to our final abode. The meaning is that heaven awaits you, but Tartarus me, unless divine mercy comes to my rescue. Or

[1] The fifth line of the eclogue reads :

Una fuit genetrix, at spes non una sepulchri.

the sentence can be taken literally, just as it reads, for you have now a sure abode, and consequently a fairly sure hope of sepulture, while I am still wandering about at random, and everything in my future is quite unsure.

The inaccessible peak, which Monicus upbraids Silvius for struggling toward, panting and exhausted though he is, is the height of fame, the rarer sort of fame, which but few succeed in attaining to. The deserts where Silvius is said to wander are scholarly pursuits. These to-day are desert places indeed, being in some cases forsaken outright, through love of money, in others despaired of and neglected, in consequence of intellectual sluggishness. The mossy rocks are the rich and great, the moss being their inherited wealth, which has slowly gathered about them. Murmuring fountains can be used of men of letters and of those who have the gift of eloquence, inasmuch as little streams of intellectual influence flow from the wellsprings of genius that are within them, with a sound, so to speak, that charms and delights us. As for Silvius' swearing by Pales, that is a shepherd oath, for Pales is the shepherds' goddess. We may understand there Mary, who is not a goddess, to be sure, but yet is the mother of God. Parthenias is Virgil himself. It is not a name of my devising. We read in his biography that he well deserved to be styled Parthenias, or the virgin; so his whole life showed. That the reader may be sure to understand this reference the place is added; the region, as I express it, where Benacus, a lake of Cisalpine

Gaul, produces a son that closely resembles himself. This son is the Mincius, a river that we associate with Mantua, which is Virgil's native town.

On the other hand, the shepherd of noble blood who has been brought here from another land signifies Homer. In that passage almost every word has a meaning. Even the *inde*, which is put for *deinde*, is used not without a certain mysteriousness, seeing that I came in contact with Virgil when I was a boy, but with Homer *afterwards*, when I was somewhat advanced in years.[1] . . . The epithet *noble* is of course Homer's by right, for what is more truly noble than his language or mind? Again, *I know not from what valley he has come* was added because there are varying opinions as to the place of his birth, no one of which have I accepted in that place in the eclogue. Finally, that Virgil *drank at the Homeric spring* is a fact which is known to everyone who has to do with poetry. The *mistress* of whom they both are said to be worthy is Fame, for whose sakes they are poets. Except for their mistresses lovers would not sing. The *bristling forest* and the *mountains that rise into the air*, at which Silvius is amazed because they do not follow after these sweet singers, are the uncultivated multitude and the persons who occupy high stations. The *descent from the mountain-tops* to the bottom of

[1] The reference here seems to be to lines 13 *sqq.* (Basle edition of the *Opera*, 1581.) Possibly *inde* stood originally at the beginning of line 20, for *ecce*. There is much evidence, throughout the letter, to the effect that Petrarch either had before him a slightly different text from that known to us or merely reviewed the eclogue hastily and then trusted to his memory or impressions while writing.

the valleys, and the ascent from the valleys into the mountains again, which Silvius refers to in speaking of himself, are the transition from the heights of theory to the low and level ground of practice, and, conversely, the movement in the opposite direction, when our attitude changes. The *fountain* which praises the singer is the chorus of scholars. The *dry and barren crags* are the ignorant and illiterate, who, like the rocks where echo dwells, possess mere voice and power of agreement, without any power of discrimination. The *nymphs*, the goddesses of the fountains, are the divine minds of scholars. The *threshold* over which Monicus invites Silvius to pass is that of the Carthusian order, into which assuredly no one has ever been lured by deception, or against his will, as many persons have been into other religious bodies. The *shepherd* whose singing Monicus prefers to Homer and Virgil is no other than David. The mention of *singing to the psaltery* is peculiarly appropriate in his case, because of the psalms, which are his work. *In the middle of the night*, on account of the singing of the psalms in your churches at early dawn. The *two rivers from a single source*, as Monicus puts it first by mistake, are the Tigris and the Euphrates, well-known streams of Armenia. Then the *single river from a double source* is the Jordan, in Judæa. For this fact we have many authorities, among them Jerome, who was a diligent student of those regions and lived there for a long time. The names of the two sources are Jor and Dan. By their union both the stream and its name are formed. The Jordan

empties, it is said, into the Sea of Sodom, where we are told that the fields are strewn with ashes from the burning of the cities. In this river Christ, we learn, was baptised by John. So the *hairy youth* is John the Baptist, who was but a youth, virgin, pure, innocent, clad in hairy raiment, unkempt, wearing the skin of a goat, with locks uncombed, with face blackened by the suns. Then by *Apollo*, whom I describe as son of Jupiter and god of intellect, I mean Christ, who is the son of God, and very God himself, and moreover, as I suggest, our god of intellect and wisdom. For, as all theologians know, among the attributes of the persons that constitute the Holy Trinity, one and indivisible, wisdom belongs to the Son; he is the wisdom of the Father.

Again, the *hoarse voice* and *never-ceasing tears* and *oft-repeated name of Jerusalem* are intended as a reference to David, because of his style, which at first seems rough and full of lamentation, and furthermore because there really is frequent mention of that city in the psalms, sometimes historical, sometimes allegorical. Now there follows a brief enumeration of the subjects which the poets whom Silvius is striving to exalt are wont to sing. To explain all this would take a long time. Besides it is sufficiently clear already to those who are proficient in such matters. And then Monicus replies, excusing this harshness of David, and running with like brevity over the list of subjects which he has treated.

The youth about whose deeds Silvius has begun to weave his song is Scipio Africanus, who laid

Polyphemus low upon the African shore. The reference there is to Hannibal, the Carthaginian leader. Hannibal and Polyphemus were both one-eyed, after Hannibal's loss of an eye in Italy. The *Libyan lions*, in which we know that Africa abounds, are the other Carthaginian leaders, who were hurled from power by the same conqueror. The *sacrifices* that were consumed are the ships which he burned, the ships upon which all the hopes of the Carthaginians had hung. He destroyed five hundred of them before their very eyes, so Roman history tells us. The designation of *starry youth* is partly because of the heroic valour which he possessed above all other men, and which Virgil characterises as 'burning,' Lucan as 'fiery'; and partly because the Romans of his day were led by their admiration of him to credit him with divine origin. The Italians are said to praise him *from the opposite shore* because of the fact that the shore of Italy really was opposed to that of Africa, not alone in temper and feeling but in situation too. Rome itself is directly across from Carthage.

However, although this youth is praised so widely, nobody has sung of him; by which I meant to suggest that although all history is full of his deeds and his renown, and Ennius has written a great deal about him, in his rude and unpolished style, as Valerius calls it, there still is no carefully finished metrical treatment of his achievements as yet. So I decided long ago to sing of him myself, as best I could. My poem of *Africa* is about him. I began it in my youth, with a high heart. God grant that

I may be permitted in my old age to bring it to the happy conclusion which I then dreamed of. The danger which always inheres in such postponement of a well-considered plan, and the mutability and uncertainty of this life of ours, Monicus bids us ponder upon, in his concluding remarks, which scarcely call for further explanation. And you will also understand the few sentences at the close, if you will reflect a little. Farewell.

Written at Padua, on the second day of December, toward evening.

This next letter gives one some notion of the difficulties of a scholar's life in Petrarch's day:

On the Scarcity of Copyists.

To Lapo da Castiglionchio.[1]

Your Cicero has been in my possession four years and more. There is a good reason, though, for so long a delay; namely, the great scarcity of copyists who understand such work. It is a state of affairs that has resulted in an incredible loss to scholarship. Books that by their nature are a little hard to understand are no longer multiplied, and have ceased to be generally intelligible, and so have sunk into utter neglect, and in the end have perished. This age of ours consequently has let fall, bit by bit, some of the richest and sweetest fruits that the tree of know-

[1] *Fam.*, xviii., 12.

ledge has yielded; has thrown away the results of the vigils and labours of the most illustrious men of genius, things of more value, I am almost tempted to say, than anything else in the whole world. . . .

But I must return to your Cicero. I could not do without it, and the incompetence of the copyists would not let me possess it. What was left for me but to rely upon my own resources, and press these weary fingers and this worn and ragged pen into the service? The plan that I followed was this. I want you to know it, in case you should ever have to grapple with a similar task. Not a single word did I read except as I wrote. But how is that, I hear someone say; did you write without knowing what it was that you were writing? Ah! but from the very first it was enough for me to know that it was a work of Tullius, and an extremely rare one too. And then as soon as I was fairly started I found at every step so much sweetness and charm, and felt so strong a desire to advance, that the only difficulty which I experienced in reading and writing at the same time came from the fact that my pen could not cover the ground so rapidly as I wanted it to, whereas my expectation had been rather that it would outstrip my eyes, and that my ardour for writing would be chilled by the slowness of my reading. So the pen held back the eye, and the eye drove on the pen, and I covered page after page, delighting in my task, and committing many and many a passage to memory as I wrote. For just in proportion as the writing is slower than the

reading does the passage make a deep impression and cling to the mind.

And yet I must confess that I did finally reach a point in my copying where I was overcome by weariness; not mental, for how unlikely that would be where Cicero was concerned, but the sort of fatigue that springs from excessive manual labour. I began to feel doubtful about this plan that I was following, and to regret having undertaken a task for which I had not been trained; when suddenly I came across a place where Cicero tells how he himself copied the orations of—someone or other; just who it was I do not know, but certainly no Tullius, for there is but one such man, one such voice, one such mind. These are his words: "You say that you have been in the habit of reading the orations of Cassius in your idle moments. But I," he jestingly adds, with his customary disregard of his adversary's feelings, "have made a practice of *copying* them, so that I might *have* no idle moments." As I read this passage I grew hot with shame, like a modest young soldier who hears the voice of his beloved leader rebuking him. I said to myself, "So Cicero copied orations that another wrote, and you are not ready to copy his? What ardour! what scholarly devotion! what reverence for a man of godlike genius!" These thoughts were a spur to me, and I pushed on, with all my doubts dispelled. If ever from my darkness there shall come a single ray that can enhance the splendour of the reputation which his heavenly eloquence has won for him, it will proceed in no slight

measure from the fact that I was so captivated by his ineffable sweetness that I did a thing in itself most irksome with such delight and eagerness that I scarcely knew I was doing it at all.

So then at last your Cicero has the happiness of returning to you, bearing you my thanks. And yet he also stays, very willingly, with me; a dear friend, to whom I give the credit of being almost the only man of letters for whose sake I would go to the length of spending my time, when the difficulties of life are pressing on me so sharply and inexorably and the cares pertaining to my literary labours make the longest life seem far too short, in transcribing compositions not my own. I may have done such things in former days, when I thought myself rich in time, and had not learned how stealthily it slips away: but I now know that this is of all our riches the most uncertain and fleeting; the years are closing in upon me now, and there is no longer any room for deviation from the beaten path. I am forced to practice strict economy; I only hope that I have not begun too late. But Cicero! he assuredly is worthy of a part of even the little that I still have left. Farewell.

The two letters that follow, and that conclude this chapter, are given as indicative of the various ways in which Petrarch brought his enthusiasm for the classics to bear upon his contemporaries. It was partly through such conscious effort, and partly through the

general spirit and tone of all his letters, and of his other writings too, that he affected the thought of his time.

Ignorance and Presumption Rebuked.

To Giovanni Andrea di Bologna.[1]

I find it hard to tell you how much my ears, fatigued by the clamour of the multitude, have been refreshed by your letter, which I have read and re-read several times over. You thought it verbose, as I learned at the end; but I found nothing to criticise in it except its brevity. Your threat at the close, that in the future you will be more concise, I did not like. I should prefer to have you more detailed. But that shall be as you please; you are my master; it is not for you to think of my preferences, but for me to try to adapt myself to yours.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that the game is to be entirely in your hands. Things often turn out, as you very well know, quite differently from what we expect. It is possible that you

[1] *Fam.*, iv., 15. Giovanni Andrea († 1348), whose lectures Petrarch had attended when at the University of Bologna, was renowned as an expert in the canon law; he was called "the Archdoctor of the Decretum," and held his chair in the University for no less than forty-five years. His extant writings do not exhibit the ignorance which Petrarch here exposes. He was perhaps, as Fracassetti suggests, *un poco più cauto e considerato* in his books than in his lectures to his students and his letters to his friends. *Cf. Let. delle Cose Fam.*, i., 568 *sqq.*

may once in a while hear something from me that would force even the most devoted lover of silence to speak out. Do you want me to show you, here and now, that I can live up to that threat ? Very well; I will do it. But first of all let me protest that I entertain the same opinion concerning you that Macrobius does of Aristotle; begotten perhaps by my love for you, perhaps by the truth,—I do not attempt to decide. I consider you scarcely capable of ignorance, upon any subject whatever. If anything does escape you that seems contrary to fact, I conclude either that you have spoken a little hastily, or, as Macrobius says, that you were indulging in a playful jest. I am not thinking now of what you wrote concerning Jerome, that you place him above all the other fathers of the church. Your opinion upon that subject is of long standing and widely known, and not at all new to me. Although it really seems to me idle to contend thus from the comparative point of view about geniuses who are all superlative, still, on the other hand, you cannot be mistaken in what you say. Whatever wins your approval will be greatest and best. And yet I remember that I used to debate this matter a great deal with your friend of glorious memory, Giacomo, Bishop of Lombez, and that, while he followed in your footsteps and always and invariably preferred Jerome, I used to give the palm among all our Catholic writers to Augustine. And—well, I believe upon reflection that I will dismiss my fears of offending either the truth or your susceptibilities, my father, and say precisely what I think. There

are many bright stars, of varying magnitude; one we may call Jupiter, another Arcturus, another Lucifer, but the great Sun of the Church is surely Augustine.

This, however, as I have implied, is a matter on which I am not disposed to lay much stress. Freedom of choice can harm no one; freedom of judgment must be respected. But the statement that follows, that among ethical writers you place Valerius highest, does amaze me; that is, if you were speaking seriously and will abide by what you say, and not jestingly, just for the sake of trying me. For if Valerius is first, where pray does Plato stand? and Aristotle? and Cicero? and Annæus Seneca, whom good judges have ranked as a moralist above them all? Perhaps Plato and Tullius will have to be dropped from my list, however, on grounds that you have stated elsewhere in your letter. For, to my great astonishment—I really cannot conceive what you were thinking of—you declare that they are poets, and ought to be admitted to the poetic choir! If your saying so should make it so, you would accomplish more than you imagine. Apollo would smile upon you and the Muses applaud, when they found you introducing your distinguished new denizens to the hills and groves of Parnassus.[1]

What in the world induced you to think or say

[1] Petrarch not infrequently said sharp things, and said them well, as here. He is witty, too, at times. He often indulges, also, in a quiet jest or a bit of banter. He habitually takes the mellow tolerant view of harmless follies and foibles. But humour, pure and simple, of the highest type, the humour that is a deep and essential part of a man's nature, and that consequently is all-embracing and

such a thing, when it is so plain that Tullius in his early works is the greatest of orators, and in his later an eminent philosopher? Besides, while we feel everywhere that Virgil, for instance, is a poet, Tullius is nowhere so. What we read in the *Declamations* is certainly true, that Virgil's felicity deserted him when he wrote in prose, and Cicero's eloquence when he wrote in verse. And then what am I to say of Plato, who by the consensus of all the greatest judges is not a poet at all, but the prince of philosophers? Turn to Cicero, to Augustine, to other writers who speak with authority, as many of them as you please, and you will find that wherever in their books they have exalted Aristotle above the rest of the philosophers they have always taken pains to declare that Plato is the one exception. What it is that makes Plato a poet I cannot imagine, unless it be a remark of Panætius, quoted by Tullius, where he is denominated the Homer of philosophy. This means nothing more than chief of philosophers; as preëminent among them as Homer among the poets. If we do not explain it so, what are we to say of Tullius himself, when in a certain passage in the letters to Atticus he calls Plato his God? They are both trying in every possible way to express their sense of the godlike nature of Plato's genius; hence the name of Homer, and, more explicit still, that of God.

ever-present, he lacks. To this lack may be ascribed, in his life, the tendency to take himself at times somewhat too seriously; and, in his writings, the absence of that saving sense of 'the little more' and 'the little less' without which perfect proportion and perfect taste are well-nigh impossible in artistic productions.

Next, prompted by this reference to Cicero and Plato, you discourse—with wonderful eloquence and charm for one who is speaking about things that he does not understand—upon the poets in general, entering into an enthusiastic discussion of the identity of one and another of them, the time when they were born, the characteristics of their style, the particular kind of poetry that they affected, and their place upon the roll of fame. To review all this in detail would be too long a task,—so numerous are the things which none of us had ever heard of before, but you have now disclosed to such of us as are eager to learn, in this eloquent epistle. And yet on second thought, if you will concede to me, or rather not to me but to my calling, the right to offer just one objection, I shall express my wonder at finding the names of Nævius and Plautus so entirely unknown to you that you think me guilty of a solecism in inserting them in my letter, and reprove me indirectly for daring, as Flaccus puts it, to invent characters before unheard of. You do not make this charge in so many words, but your doubts are such and so stated as to amount to nothing less than a condemnation of my temerity in bringing upon the stage names that are strange and foreign. It is true, you did in the end curb your longing to speak plainly, and with your usual courtesy and modesty chose to blame rather your own ignorance. And yet, unless I am greatly mistaken, it is one of those cases where a man's words say one thing but his real convictions loudly proclaim another. I wonder at this, for Terence you

seem to know very well, and he, at the very beginning of his works, in the prologue of the *Andria*, makes definite mention of Nævius and Plautus, and, in the same verse, of Ennius too. Then in the *Eunuchus* he refers to them again, and in the *Adelphi* speaks of Plautus alone. Cicero, too, mentions them together, in his *De Senectute*, and Aulus Gellius in his *Noctes Atticæ*, where he gives their epitaphs, in old-fashioned Latin. All this argument is needless, however, for who ever heard the name of poetry apart from the names of these two men? Your amazement therefore fills me with amaze; and I beg you, my father,—if you will let me speak freely,—not to allow these lucubrations of yours to pass into any hands but mine. The brighter one's renown, the more carefully should it be guarded. To me, indeed, you may say whatever you wish, as freely as to yourself. You may change and retract, as scholars have to do when they commune with their own past thoughts. But when your words have gone abroad all power of choice is taken away, and you must submit to whatever judgments the multitude may pronounce upon you. I send your letter back to you in safe custody, and send this with it, keeping a copy, though, simply that I may be able, if you should desire to continue the discussion, to place your arguments by the side of mine which called them forth, instead of having to tax my memory for what I had said. . . .

In writing thus I do not for a moment forget that a letter of reproof addressed to a father by a son can scarcely fail to seem harsh and rude. But you must

let my love for you excuse such boldness. My regard for your reputation compels me to speak, for if I keep silent you will be sure to hear these things from others, or, still worse, will be injured by severe judgments uttered behind your back. . . .

Let me say, then, that I detect in your writings a constant effort to make a display. This, I take it, accounts for your tendency to roam through strange volumes, culling out fine passages to weave into your own discourses. Your pupils, amazed at such an array of names, applaud you and call you omniscient, just as if you really knew every author the titles of whose books your memory happens to retain. Scholars, however, find it easy to discriminate between a man's acquisitions and his borrowings; easy, too, to determine what portion of the latter he has a right to, what he holds by precarious tenure, and what he has simply stolen; when he has drunk deep, from a full fountain, and when he has taken only a hasty sip.

It is a childish thing to glory in a mere display of memory. As Seneca has said, it is unseemly for a grown man to go gathering nosegays; he should care for fruit rather than flowers. But you, in spite of your years and the venerableness that they have brought with them; in spite of the fact that you are of great eminence in your profession; indeed,—for this task of taking you down is a thankless one, and I am glad now and then to try smoothing you down instead,[1]—are the very first man of your time in the

[1] The original demands some such forced play upon words: 'ut non semper pungam sed interdum ungam.'

department of literature to which you have devoted yourself, nevertheless, like a truant child, break bounds, and go wandering away into fields where you do not belong, and spend the evening of your days in picking pretty flowers. You seem to take delight in exploring new regions, where the paths are unknown to you and you are sure to go astray once in a while or fall into a pit. You like to follow the example of those who parade their knowledge before their doors, like so much merchandise, while their houses within are empty. Ah! it is safer to be something than to be always trying to seem to be. Ostentation is difficult and dangerous. Moreover, just when you are most desirous of being deemed great, innumerable little things are sure to happen which not only reduce you to your true dimensions but bring you below them. No one intellect should ever strive for distinction in more than one pursuit. Those who boast of preëminence in many arts are either divinely endowed or utterly shameless or simply mad. Who ever heard of such presumption in olden times, on the part of either Greeks or men of our own race? It is a new practice, a new kind of effrontery. To-day men write up over their doors inscriptions full of vainglory, containing claims which, if true, would make them, as Pliny puts it, superior even to the law of the land. But when one looks within—ye gods! what emptiness is there!

So, in conclusion, I beg you, if my words have any weight, to be content within your own bounds. Do not imitate these men who are all promise and

no performance; who, as the comic poet has said, know everything and yet know nothing. There is a certain wise old Greek proverb that bids everyone stick to the trade that he understands. Farewell.[1]

The Young Humanist of Ravenna.

To Boccaccio.[2]

A year after your departure I had the good fortune to secure the services of a fine, generous, young lad, whom I am sorry you do not know. He knows you well, for he has often seen you, at Venice, in your house,[3] where I am now living, and also at the home of our friend Donato, and on such occasions has observed you very carefully, as is natural at his age. I want you to know him, too, so far as that is possible at such long range, and to see him with the mind's eye, when you read my letters, and so I will tell you a little about him. He was born on the coast of the Adriatic, at about the time, if I am not

[1] The old jurist did not take this criticism kindly, but made an angry effort to justify himself; whereupon Petrarch wrote again, exposing his ignorance and childishness more savagely even than in this first epistle.

[2] *Fam.*, xxiii., 19.

[3] The reader must not be led by this *façon de parler* to infer that the impecunious Boccaccio owned a mansion in Venice. Petrarch was fond of speaking of his own possessions as belonging to his friends; he refers here to the house furnished him by the Venetian government in exchange for his library. Boccaccio had visited him there, in the summer of 1363, some two years before this letter was written.—For the discussions to which the description of this brilliant youth have given rise the reader is referred to Fracassetti's long note, *Let. delle Cose Fam.*, v., 91 *sqq.*

mistaken, when you were living there,[1] with the former lord of that region, the grandfather of him who now holds sway. The lad's own family and fortune are humble. But he is well endowed, nevertheless. He has a force of character and a power of self-control that would be praiseworthy even in old age; and a mind that is keen and flexible; and a memory that is rapacious, and capacious, and, best of all, tenacious. My bucolics, which are divided off into twelve eclogues, as you know, he committed to memory within eleven days, reciting one section to me each evening and two the last time, repeating them without a single hitch, as if he had the book before his eyes. Besides that, he has himself a great deal of invention,—a rare thing in these days,—and a fine enthusiasm, and a heart that loves the Muses; and he is already, as Maro hath it, making new songs of his own; and if he lives, and his development keeps pace with his years, as I am confident it will, he surely will be something great, as was prophesied of Ambrose by his father. There is much to be said for him even now, at an age when usually there is very little to say. Of one of his good tendencies you have just heard. You shall hear now of another, a trait that constitutes the best possible foundation for sound character and solid intellectual attainments. As the common herd loves money and longs to possess it, even so, and more, does he hate it and spurn it. To 'add to golden numbers golden numbers' he considers labour worse than lost. He is scarcely willing to acquire

[1] At Ravenna.

the necessaries of life. In his love of solitude, his fasting, his vigils, he vies with me, often surpasses me. In brief, his character has so recommended him to me that he is every bit as dear to me as a son whom I had begotten; perhaps dearer, because a son—such alas! are the ways of our young men nowadays—would wish to rule, while all his study is to obey, to follow not his own inclinations but my will, and this not from any selfish motive, such as the hope of reward, but solely from love and, possibly, an expectation of being benefited by association with me.[1] . . .

And now I come, at the close, to what really was first in my thoughts. The lad has a decided leaning toward poetry; and if he perseveres in his efforts, till in due time he learns to think clearly and vigorously, he will compel your wonder and your congratulations. But so far he is vague and uncertain, because of the feebleness of youth, and does not always know what he wants to say. What he does want to, however, he says very nobly and beautifully. So it frequently happens that there falls from him some poem that is not only pleasing to the ear but dignified and graceful and well-considered, the sort of work that you would ascribe, if you were ignorant of the author, to some writer of long experience. I am confident that he will develop vigour of thought and expression, and work out, as the result of his experiments, a style of his own, and learn to avoid imitation, or, better, to conceal it, so as to give the impression not of copying but rather of bringing to

[1] For the passage here omitted see p. 150 *sq.* above.

Italy from the writers of old something new. Now, however, imitation actually is his greatest joy, as is usual at his time of life. Sometimes his delight in another's genius seems to lend to his spirit wings, and he defies all the restraints of his art and soars aloft, so high that he cannot continue his flight as he should, and has to descend in a fashion that betrays him. The strongest of all these admirations is for Virgil. It is marvellously strong. He thinks very many of our poets worthy of praise, but Virgil worthy almost of worship. He loves him so, is so fascinated by him, that he often takes pains to weave bits from his poems into his own verse. I, rejoicing to find that he is overtaking me and longing to see him press on and become what I have always aspired to be, warn him, in a fatherly and friendly fashion, to consider carefully what he is about. An imitator must see to it that what he writes is similar, but not the very same; and the similarity, moreover, should be not like that of a painting or statue to the person represented, but rather like that of a son to a father, where there is often great difference in the features and members, and yet after all there is a shadowy something,—akin to what our painters call one's *air*,—hovering about the face, and especially the eyes, out of which there grows a likeness that immediately, upon our beholding the child, calls the father up before us. If it were a matter of measurement every detail would be found to be different, and yet there certainly is some subtle presence there that has this effect.

In much the same way we writers, too, must see to

it that along with the similarity there is a large measure of dissimilarity; and furthermore such likeness as there is must be elusive, something that it is impossible to seize except by a sort of still-hunt, a quality to be felt rather than defined. In brief, we may appropriate another's thought, and may even copy the very colours[1] of his style, but we must abstain from borrowing his actual words. The resemblance in the one case is hidden away below the surface; in the other it stares the reader in the face. The one kind of imitation makes poets; the other —apes. It may all be summed up by saying with Seneca, and with Flaccus before him, that we must write just as the bees make honey, not keeping the flowers but turning them into a sweetness of our own, blending many very different flavours into one, which shall be unlike them all, and better.

I often say such things, and he always listens as

[1] A metaphor of which Petrarch is fond. Usually his employment of it can be traced directly to Cicero and Quintilian, but now and then it occurs in a passage that seems to tell of his own keen delight in the sensuous side of language; as in *Fam.*, viii., 7, where he says to 'Socrates': 'Ubi . . . dulciter intermicantes colores rhetoricos quærebamus, nil nisi dolentis interjectiones . . . aspicimus.' This quotation, and the entire letter above, concerning the young Humanist, are but two among very many indications, scattered through the whole correspondence, that Petrarch had thought long and carefully about literary art, and had formulated to himself all of its principles, down to the very least. His judgment and feeling concerning literature were unerring, except when he was led astray by his allegorising tendency and by a mediæval fondness for senseless plays upon words. Yet outside of his own art he seems to have been decidedly crude æsthetically, as has been the case with many another great man of letters, before and since.

he would to his own father. It happened the other day, though, as I was advising him in this fashion, that he offered the following objection. "I see your meaning," he said, "and I admit the truth of all that you say. But the occasional, sparing, use of others' words,—that is a thing for which I have abundant warrant, in the practice of very many of our poets, and of yourself above all." I was amazed, and replied, "If ever you have found such things in my works, my son, you may be sure that it is due to some oversight, and is very far from being my deliberate intention. I know that cases of this sort, where a writer makes use of another's words, are to be found by the thousand in the poets; but I myself have always taken the utmost pains, when composing, to avoid every trace both of my own work and, more particularly, of my predecessors', difficult though such avoidance is. But where, pray, is this passage of mine, by which you justify yourself?" "In your bucolics, number six, where, not far from the end, there is a verse that concludes with these words: *atque intonat ore.*" I was astounded; for I realised, as he spoke, what I had failed to see when writing, that this is the ending of one of Virgil's lines, in the sixth book of his divine poem. I determined to communicate the discovery to you; not that there is room any longer for correction, the poem being well known by this time and scattered far and wide, but that you might upbraid yourself for having left it to another to point out this slip of mine; or, if it has chanced to escape your own notice so far, that you might learn

of it now, and at the same time might be led to reflect on the fact that we mortals, all of us,—not I alone, who with all my zeal and industry am handicapped by insufficiency of talent and literary training, but all other men as well, however great their learning and their abilities,—are so limited in our powers that all our inventions have some element of incompleteness, perfection being the prerogative of him alone from whom proceeds the little that we know and are able to do. Then, in conclusion, I want you to join me in praying Virgil to pardon me, and not harden his heart against me for unwittingly borrowing — not stealing — these few words from him,—who himself has stolen outright, many and many a time, from Homer, and Ennius, and Lucretius, and many another poet. Farewell.

PAVIA, Oct. 28, [1365].

IV

TRAVELS

Ulysseos errores erroribus meis confer: profecto si nominis et rerum claritas una foret, nec diutius erravit ille, nec latius.—*Præfatio.*

THE Italians were probably the first among modern peoples to discover the outer world to be something beautiful in itself. "Would that you could know," Petrarch writes to a friend, "with what delight I wander, free and alone, among the mountains, forests, and streams." He spent many years, as we have seen, in his simple rustic home at Vaucluse, and throughout his life he was in the habit of retiring now and then to the seclusion of the country. In no way did his tastes more nearly approach our modern predilections than in his love of nature and his passion for travel.

He was once invited to accompany a friend upon a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but he discreetly refused the invitation; not that he feared the perils of the deep, but he could not overcome his horror of sea-sickness, which he had several times experienced upon the Mediterranean. Instead of joining his friend, he prepared a little guide-book[1] for him, which might serve to call his attention to the noteworthy objects

[1] *Itinerarium Syriacum*, *Opera*, pp. 556 *sqq.*

upon the long journey from Genoa to Jerusalem. It is significant that Petrarch deals principally in his little manual not with the half-legendary attractions of the Orient, but with the familiar beauties of their own Italy. He does not forget, at the very opening of the journey, the lovely valleys of the Riviera, with their tumbling brooks, and the pleasing contrast of wildness and verdure on the hills to the east of Genoa. But, like a true lover of nature, he felt himself powerless adequately to describe the scene, and contented himself with commending to his friend's admiration the beauties which no mortal pen could depict.[1] The four letters which follow have been chosen with the aim of illustrating Petrarch's attitude toward the world about him.

An Excursion to Paris, the Netherlands, and the Rhine.

To Cardinal Giovanni Colonna.[2]

I have lately been travelling through France, not on business, as you know, but simply from a youth-

[1] "Quæ multo facilius tibi sit mirari quam cuiquam hominum stylo amplecti." *Itinerarium Syriacum*, *Opera*, p. 557.

[2] *Fam.*, i., 3, 4. The two letters in which Petrarch describes his journey to the north are here given together. The first is dated from Aix-la-Chapelle, June 21 [1333], and the second from Lyons, August 9, of the same year.

ful curiosity to see the country. I finally penetrated into Germany, to the banks of the Rhine itself. I have carefully noted the customs of the people, and have been much interested in observing the characteristics of a country hitherto unknown to me, and in comparing the things I saw with those at home. While I found much to admire in both countries, I in no way regretted my Italian origin. Indeed, the more I travel, the more my admiration for Italy grows. If Plato, as he himself says, thanked the immortal gods, among other things, for making him a Greek and not a barbarian, why should not we too thank the Lord for the land of our birth, unless to be born a Greek be considered more noble than to be born an Italian. This, however, would be to assert that the slave was above his master. No Greekling, however shameless, would dare to make such a claim, if he but recollected that long before Rome was founded and had by superior strength established her sway, long before the world yet knew of the Romans, " men of the toga, lords of the earth," a beggarly fourth part of Italy, a region desert and uninhabited, was nevertheless styled by its Greek colonists " Greater Greece." If that scanty area could then be called great, how very great, how immense, must the Roman power have seemed after Corinth had fallen, after Ætolia had been devastated and Argos, Mycenæ, and other cities had been taken, after the Macedonian kings had been captured, Pyrrhus vanquished, and Thermopylæ a second time drenched with Asiatic blood! Certainly no one can deny that it is a trifle more distinguished to be an

Italian than a Greek. This, however, is a matter which we may perhaps take up elsewhere.

To revert to my travels in France,—I visited the capital of the kingdom, Paris, which claims Julius Cæsar as its founder. I must have felt much the same upon entering the town as did Apuleius when he wandered about Hypata in Thessaly. I spent no little time there, in open-mouthed wonder; and I was so full of interest and eagerness to know the truth about what I had heard of the place that when daylight failed me I even prolonged my investigations into the night. After loitering about for a long time, gaping at the sights, I at last satisfied myself that I had discovered the point where truth left off and fiction began. But it is a long story, and not suited for a letter, and I must wait until I see you and can rehearse my experiences at length.

To pass over the intervening events, I also visited Ghent, which proudly claims the same illustrious founder as Paris, and I saw something of the people of Flanders and Brabant, who devote themselves to preparing and weaving wool. I also visited Liège, which is noted for its clergy, and Aix-la-Chapelle, Charles's capital, where in a marble church I saw the tomb of that great prince, which is very properly an object of veneration to the barbarian nations.[1] . . .

I did not leave Aix-la-Chapelle until I had bathed in the waters, which are warm like those at Baiæ. It

[1] This first letter closes here with a legend of Charles the Great which Petrarch heard at Aix-la-Chapelle.

is from them that the town is said to derive its name.[1] I then proceeded to Cologne, which lies on the left bank of the Rhine, and is noted for its situation, its river, and its inhabitants. I was astonished to find such a degree of culture in a barbarous land. The appearance of the city, the dignity of the men, the attractiveness of the women, all surprised me. The day of my arrival happened to be the feast of St. John the Baptist. It was nearly sunset when I reached the city. On the advice of the friends whom my reputation, rather than any true merit, had won for me even there, I allowed myself to be led immediately from the inn to the river, to witness a curious sight. And I was not disappointed, for I found the river-bank lined with a multitude of remarkably comely women. Ye gods, what faces and forms! And how well attired! One whose heart was not already occupied might well have met his fate here.

I took my stand upon a little rise of ground where I could easily follow what was going on. There was a dense mass of people, but no disorder of any kind. They knelt down in quick succession on the bank, half hidden by the fragrant grass, and turning up their sleeves above the elbow they bathed their hands and white arms in the eddying stream. As they talked together, with an indescribably soft foreign murmur, I felt that I had never better appreciated Cicero's remark, which, like the old proverb, reminds us that we are all deaf and dumb when we have to do with an unknown tongue. I,

[1] *I. e.*, Aquisgrana.

however, had the aid of kind interpreters, for—and this was not the least surprising thing I noted there —these skies, too, give nurture to Pierian spirits. So when Juvenal wonders that

> Fluent Gaul has taught the British advocate,[1]

let him marvel, too, that

> Learned Germany many a clear-voiced bard sustained.

But, lest you should be misled by my words, I hasten to add that there are no Virgils here, although many Ovids,[2] so that you would say that the latter author was justified in his reliance upon his genius or the affection of posterity, when he placed at the end of his *Metamorphoses* that audacious prophecy where he ventures to claim that as far as the power of Rome shall extend,—nay, as far as the very name of Roman shall penetrate in a conquered world,—so widely shall his works be read by enthusiastic admirers.

When anything was to be heard or said I had to rely upon my companions to furnish both ears and tongue. Not understanding the scene, and being deeply interested in it, I asked an explanation from one of my friends, employing the Virgilian lines:

> . . . What means the crowded shore?
> What seek these eager spirits?[3]

[1] *Sat.*, xv., 111.

[2] The context would seem to indicate (as Fracassetti and de Nolhac [*op. cit.*, p. 148] assume) that Petrarch means that many copies of Ovid but none of Virgil were to be found at Cologne.

[3] *Æneid*, vi., 318 *sq.*

He told me that this was an old custom among the people, and that the lower classes, especially the women, have the greatest confidence that the threatening calamities of the coming year can be washed away by bathing on this day in the river, and a happier fate be so assured. Consequently this annual ablution has always been conscientiously performed, and always will be. I smiled at this explanation, and replied, "Those who dwell by Father Rhine are fortunate indeed if he washes their misfortunes away with him; I fear that neither Po nor Tiber could ever free us of ours. You send your ills to the Britons, by the river; we would gladly ship ours off to the Africans or Illyrians." But I was given to understand that our rivers were too sluggish. There was a great laugh over this, and then, as it was getting late, we left the spot and returned home.

During the few days following I wandered about the city, under the guidance of my friends, from morning until night. I enjoyed these rambles not so much for what I actually saw as on account of the reminiscences of our ancestors, who have left such extraordinary monuments to the Roman power in this far-distant country. Marcus Agrippa came, perhaps, most prominently before me. He was the founder of this colony, to which, in preference to all his other great works whether at home or abroad, he gave his own name. He was a great builder as well as a distinguished warrior. His fame was such that he was chosen by Augustus as the most desirable son-in-law in the world. His wife, whatever else

we may say of her, was at least a remarkable woman, the Emperor's only child and very dear to him. I beheld the bodies of the thousands of holy virgins who had suffered together, and the ground dedicated to these noble relics—ground which they say will of its own accord reject an unworthy corpse. I beheld the Capitol, which is an imitation of ours. But in place of our senate, meeting to consider the exigencies of peace and war, here one finds beautiful boys and girls ever lifting up together their harmonious voices in nightly hymns of praise to God. There one might hear the rattle of arms, the rolling chariots and the groans of captives; but here are peace and happiness and the voice of mirth. There it was the warrior who made his triumphal entry; here it is the Prince of Peace.

I saw, too, the great church in the very centre of the town. It is very beautiful, although still uncompleted, and is not unjustly regarded by the inhabitants as the finest building of its kind in the world. I looked with reverence upon the relics of the Three Kings, who, as we read, came once upon a time, bringing presents, to worship at the feet of a Heavenly King as he lay wailing in the manger. Their bodies were brought from the East to the West in three great leaps.[1]

You may perhaps think, noble father, that I have gone too far just here, and dwelt upon unimportant details. I readily admit it, but it is because I have nothing more at heart than to obey your commands. Among the many instructions which you gave me, as

[1] Namely, to Constantinople, then to Milan, and finally to Cologne.

I was leaving, the last one was that I should write to you as fully about the countries I visited and the various things I saw and heard as I should tell about them, were we face to face. I was not to spare the pen, nor to strive for elegance or terseness of expression. Everything was to be included, not simply the more picturesque incidents. In Cicero's words, you told me to write "whatever might come into the cheek." I promised to do this, and from the numerous letters which I have despatched on the way it would seem that I had kept my engagement. If you had desired me to treat of higher things I should have done what I could; but it seems to me in the present case that the object of my letter should be rather to instruct the reader than to give consequence to the writer. If you and I wish to appear before the public we can do so in books, but in our letters let us just talk with one another.

But to continue, I left Cologne June 30, in such heat and dust that I sighed for Virgil's "Alpine snows and the rigours of the Rhine." I next passed through the Forest of Ardennes, alone, and, as you will be surprised to hear, in time of war. But God, it is said, grants especial protection to the unwary. I had long known something of this region from books; it seemed to me a very wild and dismal place indeed. However, I will not undertake with my pen a journey which I have but just completed with my horse. After many wanderings I reached Lyons to-day. It, too, is a noble Roman colony, a little older even than Cologne. From this point two well known rivers flow together into our ocean,—the

Rhone here joining the Arar, or, as the inhabitants now call it, the Saône. But I need not tell you more about them, for they are hurrying on, one led by the other, down to Avignon, where the Roman pontiff detains you and the whole human race.

This morning when I arrived here I ran across one of your servants by accident, and plied him, as those newly arrived from foreign parts are wont to do, with a thousand questions. He knew nothing, however, except that your noble brother, whom I was hastening to join, had gone on to Rome without me. On hearing this my anxiety to proceed suddenly abated. It is now my purpose to wait here until the heat too shall abate somewhat, and until I regain my vigour by a little rest. I had not realised that I had suffered from either source until I met your servant; no kind of weariness indeed is so keenly felt as that of the mind. If the journey promises to seem tedious to me I shall float down the Rhone. In the meantime I am glad to know that your faithful servant will see that this reaches you, and that you will know where I am. As for your brother, who was to be my guide, and who now (my disappointment must be my excuse for saying it) has deserted me, I feel that my expostulations must be addressed to him directly. I beg that you will see that the enclosed message[1] reaches him as soon as may be. Farewell. Remember your friend.

LYONS, August 9.

[1] This letter to the Bishop of Lombez is preserved, and is to be found next in order in Fracassetti's collection. *Fam.*, i., 5.

A good deal has been written about Petrarch's famous ascent of Mount Ventoux. Körting assuredly exaggerates its significance when he declares it "an epoch-making deed" which would by itself substantiate Petrarch's title to be called the first modern man.[1] The reader will observe that, however modern may have been the spirit in which the excursion was undertaken, the relapse into mediæval sentiment was speedy and complete. As we shall find, Petrarch had no sooner reached the top than he bethought himself of his Augustine, before whose stern dictum the wide landscape quickly lost its fascination.

The Ascent of Mount Ventoux.

To Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro.[2]

To-day I made the ascent of the highest mountain in this region, which is not improperly called

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

[2] *Fam.*, iv., 1. This letter, written when Petrarch was about thirty-two years old, is addressed to an Augustinian monk, professor of divinity and philosophy in the University of Paris, which drew several of its most famous teachers from Italy. It was probably in Paris, during the journey described above, that Petrarch first met him. The poet, we may infer from the present letter, made him his spiritual confidant, confessed to him his sinful love for Laura, whom he had first met six years before, and received from the monk, in addition to the natural spiritual counsels, a copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, to which he refers below. Dionysius was called in 1339 to

Ventosum.[1] My only motive was the wish to see what so great an elevation had to offer. I have had the expedition in mind for many years; for, as you know, I have lived in this region from infancy, having been cast here by that fate which determines the affairs of men. Consequently the mountain, which is visible from a great distance, was ever before my eyes, and I conceived the plan of some time doing what I have at last accomplished to-day. The idea took hold upon me with especial force when, in re-reading Livy's *History of Rome*, yesterday, I happened upon the place where Philip of Macedon, the same who waged war against the Romans, ascended Mount Hæmus in Thessaly, from whose summit he was able, it is said, to see two seas, the Adriatic and the Euxine. Whether this be true or false I have not been able to determine, for the mountain is too far away, and writers disagree. Pomponius Mela, the cosmographer—not to mention others who have spoken of this occurrence — admits its truth without hesitation; Titus Livius, on the other hand, considers it false.

Naples, and proved an agreeable companion for the sage ruler of that kingdom, not only on account of his distinguished moral and intellectual qualities, but by reason of his proficiency in the theory and practice of astrology, in which Robert took a profound interest. This branch of his knowledge is—to the surprise of one familiar with his views—sympathetically dwelt upon by Petrarch, in a poetic epistle (i., 13) addressed to Robert on the death of their common friend in 1342. Petrarch nevertheless often fiercely attacks the astrological arts, and is distinguished in this respect from even the most enlightened men of his time, including Boccaccio. *Cf.* Fracassetti, *Let. delle Cose Fam.*, i., p. 425.

[1] That is, Windy.

I, assuredly, should not have left the question long in doubt, had that mountain been as easy to explore as this one. Let us leave this matter one side, however, and return to my mountain here,—it seems to me that a young man in private life may well be excused for attempting what an aged king could undertake without arousing criticism.

When I came to look about for a companion I found, strangely enough, that hardly one among my friends seemed suitable, so rarely do we meet with just the right combination of personal tastes and characteristics, even among those who are dearest to us. This one was too apathetic, that one over-anxious; this one too slow, that one too hasty; one was too sad, another over-cheerful; one more simple, another more sagacious, than I desired. I feared this one's taciturnity and that one's loquacity. The heavy deliberation of some repelled me as much as the lean incapacity of others. I rejected those who were likely to irritate me by a cold want of interest, as well as those who might weary me by their excessive enthusiasm. Such defects, however grave, could be borne with at home, for charity suffereth all things, and friendship accepts any burden; but it is quite otherwise on a journey, where every weakness becomes much more serious. So, as I was bent upon pleasure and anxious that my enjoyment should be unalloyed, I looked about me with unusual care, balanced against one another the various characteristics of my friends, and without committing any breach of friendship I silently condemned every trait which might prove disagree-

able on the way. And—would you believe it?—I finally turned homeward for aid, and proposed the ascent to my only brother, who is younger than I, and with whom you are well acquainted. He was delighted and gratified beyond measure by the thought of holding the place of a friend as well as of a brother.

At the time fixed we left the house, and by evening reached Malaucène, which lies at the foot of the mountain, to the north. Having rested there a day, we finally made the ascent this morning, with no companions except two servants; and a most difficult task it was. The mountain is a very steep and almost inaccessible mass of stony soil. But, as the poet has well said, "Remorseless toil conquers all." It was a long day, the air fine. We enjoyed the advantages of vigour of mind and strength and agility of body, and everything else essential to those engaged in such an undertaking, and so had no other difficulties to face than those of the region itself. We found an old shepherd in one of the mountain dales, who tried, at great length, to dissuade us from the ascent, saying that some fifty years before he had, in the same ardour of youth, reached the summit, but had gotten for his pains nothing except fatigue and regret, and clothes and body torn by the rocks and briars. No one, so far as he or his companions knew, had ever tried the ascent before or after him. But his counsels increased rather than diminished our desire to proceed, since youth is suspicious of warnings. So the old man, finding that his efforts were in vain, went a

little way with us, and pointed out a rough path among the rocks, uttering many admonitions, which he continued to send after us even after we had left him behind. Surrendering to him all such garments or other possessions as might prove burdensome to us, we made ready for the ascent, and started off at a good pace. But, as usually happens, fatigue quickly followed upon our excessive exertion, and we soon came to a halt at the top of a certain cliff. Upon starting on again we went more slowly, and I especially advanced along the rocky way with a more deliberate step. While my brother chose a direct path straight up the ridge, I weakly took an easier one which really descended. When I was called back, and the right road was shown me, I replied that I hoped to find a better way round on the other side, and that I did not mind going farther if the path were only less steep. This was just an excuse for my laziness; and when the others had already reached a considerable height I was still wandering in the valleys. I had failed to find an easier path, and had only increased the distance and difficulty of the ascent. At last I became disgusted with the intricate way I had chosen, and resolved to ascend without more ado. When I reached my brother, who, while waiting for me, had had ample opportunity for rest, I was tired and irritated. We walked along together for a time, but hardly had we passed the first spur when I forgot about the circuitous route which I had just tried, and took a lower one again. Once more I followed an easy, roundabout path through winding valleys, only to

find myself soon in my old difficulty. I was simply trying to avoid the exertion of the ascent; but no human ingenuity can alter the nature of things, or cause anything to reach a height by going down. Suffice it to say that, much to my vexation and my brother's amusement, I made this same mistake three times or more during a few hours.

After being frequently misled in this way, I finally sat down in a valley and transferred my winged thoughts from things corporeal to the immaterial, addressing myself as follows:—"What thou hast repeatedly experienced to-day in the ascent of this mountain, happens to thee, as to many, in the journey toward the blessed life. But this is not so readily perceived by men, since the motions of the body are obvious and external while those of the soul are invisible and hidden. Yes, the life which we call blessed is to be sought for on a high eminence, and strait is the way that leads to it. Many, also, are the hills that lie between, and we must ascend, by a glorious stairway, from strength to strength. At the top is at once the end of our struggles and the goal for which we are bound. All wish to reach this goal, but, as Ovid says, 'To wish is little; we must long with the utmost eagerness to gain our end.' Thou certainly dost ardently desire, as well as simply wish, unless thou deceivest thyself in this matter, as in so many others. What, then, doth hold thee back? Nothing, assuredly, except that thou wouldst take a path which seems, at first thought, more easy, leading through low and worldly pleasures. But nevertheless in the end, after long

wanderings, thou must perforce either climb the steeper path, under the burden of tasks foolishly deferred, to its blessed culmination, or lie down in the valley of thy sins, and (I shudder to think of it!), if the shadow of death overtake thee, spend an eternal night amid constant torments." These thoughts stimulated both body and mind in a wonderful degree for facing the difficulties which yet remained. Oh, that I might traverse in spirit that other road for which I long day and night, even as to-day I overcame material obstacles by my bodily exertions! And I know not why it should not be far easier, since the swift immortal soul can reach its goal in the twinkling of an eye, without passing through space, while my progress to-day was necessarily slow, dependent as I was upon a failing body weighed down by heavy members.

One peak of the mountain, the highest of all, the country people call "Sonny," why, I do not know, unless by antiphrasis, as I have sometimes suspected in other instances; for the peak in question would seem to be the father of all the surrounding ones. On its top is a little level place, and here we could at last rest our tired bodies.

Now, my father, since you have followed the thoughts that spurred me on in my ascent, listen to the rest of the story, and devote one hour, I pray you, to reviewing the experiences of my entire day. At first, owing to the unaccustomed quality of the air and the effect of the great sweep of view spread out before me, I stood like one dazed. I beheld the clouds under our feet, and what I had read

of Athos and Olympus seemed less incredible as I myself witnessed the same things from a mountain of less fame. I turned my eyes toward Italy, whither my heart most inclined. The Alps, rugged and snow-capped, seemed to rise close by, although they were really at a great distance; the very same Alps through which that fierce enemy of the Roman name once made his way, bursting the rocks, if we may believe the report, by the application of vinegar. I sighed, I must confess, for the skies of Italy, which I beheld rather with my mind than with my eyes. An inexpressible longing came over me to see once more my friend and my country. At the same time I reproached myself for this double weakness, springing, as it did, from a soul not yet steeled to manly resistance. And yet there were excuses for both of these cravings, and a number of distinguished writers might be summoned to support me.

Then a new idea took possession of me, and I shifted my thoughts to a consideration of time rather than place. " To-day it is ten years since, having completed thy youthful studies, thou didst leave Bologna. Eternal God! In the name of immutable wisdom, think what alterations in thy character this intervening period has beheld! I pass over a thousand instances. I am not yet in a safe harbour where I can calmly recall past storms. The time may come when I can review in due order all the experiences of the past, saying with St. Augustine, ' I desire to recall my foul actions and the carnal corruption of

my soul, not because I love them, but that I may the more love thee, O my God.' Much that is doubtful and evil still clings to me, but what I once loved, that I love no longer. And yet what am I saying? I still love it, but with shame, but with heaviness of heart. Now, at last, I have confessed the truth. So it is. I love, but love what I would not love, what I would that I might hate. Though loath to do so, though constrained, though sad and sorrowing, still I do love, and I feel in my miserable self the truth of the well known words, 'I will hate if I can; if not, I will love against my will.' Three years have not yet passed since that perverse and wicked passion[1] which had a firm grasp upon me and held undisputed sway in my heart began to discover a rebellious opponent, who was unwilling longer to yield obedience. These two adversaries have joined in close combat for the supremacy, and for a long time now a harassing and doubtful war has been waged in the field of my thoughts."

Thus I turned over the last ten years in my mind, and then, fixing my anxious gaze on the future, I asked myself, "If, perchance, thou shouldst prolong this uncertain life of thine for yet two lustres, and shouldst make an advance toward virtue proportionate to the distance to which thou hast departed from thine original infatuation during the past two years, since the new longing first encountered the old, couldst thou, on reaching thy fortieth year, face death, if not with complete assurance, at least with

[1] This is a reference, we may assume, to his love for Laura. See the note at the opening of this letter.

hopefulness, calmly dismissing from thy thoughts the residuum of life as it faded into old age ?"

These and similar reflections occurred to me, my father. I rejoiced in my progress, mourned my weaknesses, and commiserated the universal instability of human conduct. I had well-nigh forgotten where I was and our object in coming; but at last I dismissed my anxieties, which were better suited to other surroundings, and resolved to look about me and see what we had come to see. The sinking sun and the lengthening shadows of the mountain were already warning us that the time was near at hand when we must go. As if suddenly wakened from sleep, I turned about and gazed toward the west. I was unable to discern the summits of the Pyrenees, which form the barrier between France and Spain; not because of any intervening obstacle that I know of but owing simply to the insufficiency of our mortal vision. But I could see with the utmost clearness, off to the right, the mountains of the region about Lyons, and to the left the bay of Marseilles and the waters that lash the shores of Aigues Mortes, altho' all these places were so distant that it would require a journey of several days to reach them. Under our very eyes flowed the Rhone.

While I was thus dividing my thoughts, now turning my attention to some terrestrial object that lay before me, now raising my soul, as I had done my body, to higher planes, it occurred to me to look into my copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, a gift that I owe to your love, and that I always have about me, in memory of both the author and the giver. I

opened the compact little volume, small indeed in size, but of infinite charm, with the intention of reading whatever came to hand, for I could happen upon nothing that would be otherwise than edifying and devout. Now it chanced that the tenth book presented itself. My brother, waiting to hear something of St. Augustine's from my lips, stood attentively by. I call him, and God too, to witness that where I first fixed my eyes it was written: "And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not." I was abashed, and, asking my brother (who was anxious to hear more), not to annoy me, I closed the book, angry with myself that I should still be admiring earthly things who might long ago have learned from even the pagan philosophers that nothing is wonderful but the soul, which, when great itself, finds nothing great outside itself. Then, in truth, I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again. Those words had given me occupation enough, for I could not believe that it was by a mere accident that I happened upon them. What I had there read I believed to be addressed to me and to no other, remembering that St. Augustine had once suspected the same thing in his own case, when, on opening the book of the Apostle, as he himself tells us, the first words that he saw there were, "Not in rioting

and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

The same thing happened earlier to St. Anthony, when he was listening to the Gospel where it is written, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." Believing this scripture to have been read for his especial benefit, as his biographer Athanasius says, he guided himself by its aid to the Kingdom of Heaven. And as Anthony on hearing these words waited for nothing more, and as Augustine upon reading the Apostle's admonition sought no farther, so I concluded my reading in the few words which I have given. I thought in silence of the lack of good counsel in us mortals, who neglect what is noblest in ourselves, scatter our energies in all directions, and waste ourselves in a vain show, because we look about us for what is to be found only within. I wondered at the natural nobility of our soul, save when it debases itself of its own free will, and deserts its original estate, turning what God has given it for its honour into dishonour. How many times, think you, did I turn back that day, to glance at the summit of the mountain, which seemed scarcely a cubit high compared with the range of human contemplation,—when it is not immersed in the foul mire of earth? With every downward step I asked myself this: If we are ready to endure so much sweat and labour in order that we

may bring our bodies a little nearer heaven, how can a soul struggling toward God, up the steeps of human pride and human destiny, fear any cross or prison or sting of fortune? How few, I thought, but are diverted from their path by the fear of difficulties or the love of ease! How happy the lot of those few, if any such there be! It is of them, assuredly, that the poet was thinking, when he wrote:

> Happy the man who is skilled to understand
> Nature's hid causes; who beneath his feet
> All terrors casts, and death's relentless doom,
> And the loud roar of greedy Acheron.[1]

How earnestly should we strive, not to stand on mountain-tops, but to trample beneath us those appetites which spring from earthly impulses.[2]

With no consciousness of the difficulties of the way, amidst these preoccupations which I have so frankly revealed, we came, long after dark, but with the full moon lending us its friendly light, to the little inn which we had left that morning before dawn. The time during which the servants have been occupied in preparing our supper, I have spent in a secluded part of the house, hurriedly jotting down these experiences on the spur of the moment, lest, in case my task were postponed, my mood should change on leaving the place, and so my interest in writing flag.

[1] *Georgics*, ii., 490 *sqq*. The version here given is based upon that of Rhoades.

[2] It is but fair to the translators to note that Petrarch's style is at its worst when he falls into a train of moralising.

You will see, my dearest father, that I wish nothing to be concealed from you, for I am careful to describe to you not only my life in general but even my individual reflections. And I beseech you, in turn, to pray that these vague and wandering thoughts of mine may some time become firmly fixed, and, after having been vainly tossed about from one interest to another, may direct themselves at last toward the single, true, certain, and everlasting good.

MALAUCÈNE, April 26.

The Charms of Pavia.

To Boccaccio.[1]

You have done well to visit me by letter, since you either would not or could not come to see me in person. On hearing that you had crossed the Alps to see the Babylon of the West, worse than the ancient city of that name because nearer to us, I was in a constant state of anxiety until I learned of your safe return. For I well know the difficulties of the route, having traversed it frequently, and I thought, too, of your heaviness of body, and of your seriousness of mind, so favourable to scholarly leisure and so averse to the responsibilities which you had assumed. Worried by these considerations, I enjoyed no peace, day or night, and I thank God that you are back safe and sound. The greater the perils

[1] *Sen.*, v., 1, written probably in 1365, the year in which Boccaccio undertook the embassy to Avignon to which Petrarch refers below.

of the sea that you have escaped, the greater is my gratitude for your return.

But, unless you were in a very great hurry, it would have been very easy for you, on reaching Genoa, to have turned this way. It would have required but two days to come to see me—whom indeed you see always and wherever you go,—and you would also have seen this city of Ticinum, on the banks of the Ticino, which I believe you have never visited. It is now called Pavia, which the grammarians tell us means admirable, or wonderful. It was long the celebrated capital of the Lombards. Still earlier than their time I find that Cæsar Augustus took up his quarters here, on the eve of the German war. I suppose he wished to be nearer the scene of action. He had sent his step-son on into Germany, where he was performing the most glorious deeds of prowess. From here Augustus could observe the campaign as from a watch-tower, stimulating the leader, and ready, should one of the reverses so common in war occur, to bring to his succour all the imperial forces, as well as the majesty of his own name.

You would have seen where the Carthaginian leader gained his first victory over our generals, in a conflict during which the Roman commander was snatched from the enemy's weapons and saved from imminent death by his son, scarcely more than a boy,—a striking presage that the lad would himself one day become a great leader. You would have seen where St. Augustine is buried, and where Boethius found a fitting place of exile in which to

spend his old age and to die. They now repose together in two urns, under the same roof with King Luitprand, who transferred the body of St. Augustine[1] from Sardinia to this city. This is indeed a pious and devout concourse of illustrious men. One might think that Boethius followed in the footsteps of St. Augustine, during his life, by his spirit and writings, especially those on the Trinity,[2] which he composed after the example of Augustine, and in death, because his remains share the same tomb. You would wish that your mortal remains might have been destined to lie near such good and learned men. Finally, you would have seen a city famous in the mouths of men for its age. It is true that no reference to it occurs, so far as I can recollect, earlier than the period of the second Punic war, of which I just spoke. Indeed, if my memory does not play me false, even in connection with that period Livy only mentions the river and not the town. However, the similarity of the names—the river, *Ticinus*, and the town, *Ticinum*—might easily lead to the confusion of one with the other.[3]

But I will leave one side all such doubtful matters

[1] It was the body not of Augustine but of Boethius which was transferred from Sardinia. See Rashdall's *Hist. of the Universities*, i., 34, n. 1.

[2] Boethius was probably not a Christian, although he was until recent times regarded almost as one of the Church Fathers. It is hardly necessary to say that the theological works attributed to him are by some other hand.

[3] This is an interesting illustration of Petrarch's careful reading of the classics. He evinces a modern conscientiousness in examining the evidences of the city's age.

and confine myself to what is certain. You would find the air of the place very salubrious. I have now spent three summers here, and I do not remember to have experienced ever anywhere else such frequent and plentiful showers with so little thunder and lightning, such freedom from heat, and such steady, refreshing breezes. You would find the city beautifully situated. The Ligurians, of old a notable race and to this day a very powerful people, occupy the greater part of northern Italy, and the city lies in the midst of their territory. Commandingly situated on a slight elevation, and on the margin of gently sloping banks, it raises its crown of towers into the clouds, and enjoys a wide and free prospect on all sides, one which, so far as I know, is not exceeded in extent or beauty by that of any town which lies thus in a plain. By turning one's head ever so little one can see in one direction the snowy crest of the Alps, and in the other the wooded Apennines. The Ticino itself, descending in graceful curves and hastening to join the Po, flows close by the walls, and, as it is written, makes glad the city by its swift waters. Its two banks are joined by as fine a bridge as you would wish to see. It is the clearest of streams, both in reputation and in fact, and flows very rapidly, although just here, as if tired after its long journey and perturbed by the neighbourhood of a more famous river, it moves more deliberately, and has been deprived of some of its natural purity by the brooks which join it. It is, in short, very much like my Transalpine Sorgue, save that the Ticino is larger, while the

Sorgue, on account of the nearness of its source, is cooler in summer and warmer in winter.

You would see, also, one of those works in which you have such an interest, and in which I, too, take the greatest delight,—an equestrian statue in gilded bronze. It stands in the middle of the market-place, and seems to be just on the point of reaching, with a spirited bound, the summit of an eminence. The figure is said to have been carried off from your dear people of Ravenna. Those best trained in sculpture and painting declare it to be second to none.

Lastly, in order of time, though not of importance, you would see the huge palace, situated on the highest point of the city; an admirable building, which cost a vast amount. It was built by the princely Galeazzo, the younger of the Visconti,[1] the rulers of Milan, Pavia, and many neighbouring towns, a man who surpasses others in many ways, and in the magnificence of his buildings fairly excels himself. I am convinced, unless I be misled by my partiality for the founder, that, with your good taste in such matters, you would declare this to be the most noble production of modern art.

So if you had come you would not only have seen your friend, which I hope, and indeed know, would have been most agreeable to you, but you would have been delighted also by the spectacle, not, as Virgil says, of wonderful little things, but of a multitude of great and glorious objects. I must confess

[1] Galeazzo's rule was divided with his elder brother Bernabo.

that in my own case these objects are a source of supreme pleasure, and would keep me here, were it not that other interests call me away. I leave here shortly, but very gladly return to pass the summer months—if fate grant me more summer months.[1] . . .

[1] The description of Pavia closes here.

V

POLITICAL OPINIONS

RIENZO AND CHARLES IV

Principum ac regum familiaritatibus et nobilium amicitiis usque ad invidiam fortunatus fui. . . . Maximi regum meæ ætatis amarunt et coluerunt me ; cur autem nescio ; ipsi viderint : et ita cum quibusdam fui, ut ipsi quodam modo mecum essent, et eminentiæ eorum nullum tædium, commoda multa perceperim.

Epistola ad Posteros.

PETRARCH exhibits in his letters a deep and constant interest in public affairs, albeit, like others of his time, he views political problems somewhat broadly, with a generous disregard not only of technical detail but of human nature itself. He tells us that his intercourse with kings and princes and his friendship with noble personages was such as to excite envy in the less fortunate. His international fame, seconded by his own tastes and ambition, brought him into intimate association during a great part of his life with the potentates of his day, not only of Italy but of France and Germany,—even with the Emperor of the East. While he did not actually participate in the government, even during his stay at Milan, we find him sent upon important public missions. He prepared and delivered political addresses, and wrote letters to rulers and public men, with a hope of influencing their policy ; he composed a considerable treatise upon the art of govern-

ment;[1] he even participated, as a consulting expert, in drafting a constitution for the city of Rome.

Petrarch's interest in political reform is doubtless attributable in no small part to the patriotic enthusiasm aroused by the study of his nation's glorious past. Romans were to him but earlier Italians. Scipio Africanus was a national hero; Virgil, the great national poet; the Cæsars, the Italian rulers of the world. On visiting Cologne nothing so fascinated him as the vestiges of his forefathers. Moreover, he had ever before him in his fellow-countryman, Cicero, a literary spirit and philosopher like himself, who had not hesitated to devote his energies to public affairs.

The history of Italy under the rule of their Roman ancestors took on a celestial radiance in the eyes of those who viewed the sad decline of their country's greatness. Petrarch would, he says, have preferred any age to his own. His sole consolation lay in the rooted conviction that times were going rapidly from bad to worse. He saw upon every hand examples of the terrible inadequacy of the exist-

[1] *Sen.*, xiv., 1. Printed as a separate tractate in the Basle editions, under the title *De republica optime administranda. Opera*, pp. 372 *sqq.*

ing system to yield even the most primitive benefit of government,—the reasonable security of person and property. Disorder, robbery, and murder were every-day occurrences. When he first visited Rome, his friends deemed a hundred horsemen a necessary escort to protect him from the Orsini on his way to the city.[1] Upon the occasion of his coronation the representative of the King of Naples, who was to accompany him, failed to reach Rome; he had been captured by bandits.[2] Petrarch himself was attacked as he left the city, and was obliged to return within its walls.[3] The danger upon the highroads kept him in a constant state of apprehension when he or his friends undertook a journey. Even the peaceful retreat at Vaucluse was at last plundered and burned, and the poet declared that nowhere was one any longer sheltered from the ferocious robber bands which moved about with the precision of regular armies, and which the walls of fortified towns and the arms of their rulers were alike powerless to check.[4]

[1] *Fam.*, ii., 13 (vol. i., p. 133).

[2] *Ep. Poet. Lat.*, ii., 1.

[3] *Fam.*, iv., 8 (vol. i., p. 219).

[4] *Cf. Sen.*, x., 2 (*Opera*, pp. 870–872), where Petrarch describes the sad change of times since his student days. The mercenary bands (*grandes compagnies*) who wandered into Italy from France were doubtless a prime cause of the poet's gloomy views.

This lawlessness was naturally attributed to Italian disunion. The subdivision of Italy into a multitude of practically independent states and urban communities stimulated the development of personal political ambition and produced the "age of despots." The tyrants, in their struggle to maintain their power at home and increase their prestige abroad, inevitably resorted to the approved expedient of the usurper, territorial aggrandisement. The discomfiture or subjugation of their neighbours became the absorbing object of the foreign policy of Milan, Venice, and Florence, and of the lesser states as well. Peace, the natural enemy of the usurper, was thoroughly banished from Italy, and a perpetual state of war prevailed. There were few serious, decisive conflicts, it is true, but there was an all-pervading, self-perpetuating, Ishmaelitish antagonism between the various countries, which precluded all hope of national coöperation. "Servile Italy," indeed, "ship without a pilot!"[1]

In the face of such evils, and hopeless of reform from within, a patriotic Italian of the fourteenth century might be pardoned for looking to a foreign ruler, even to a somewhat commonplace and unpromising prince, for the

[1] *Purgatorio*, vi.

initiative in restoring order. The Italians were too completely engrossed by their own complex interstate relations, and too thoroughly convinced of the absolute inferiority of "the barbarians," seriously to apprehend that foreign intervention might ultimately develop into subjugation. History was, indeed, quite explicit upon this point. The German emperors had never been able to establish their control over Italy except partially and for the moment.

Practical considerations were not, however, the most fundamental justification and explanation of the Ghibelline reliance upon foreign intervention. The political speculation of the time shows clearly that theory was much more potent than the obvious necessity of governmental reform in fostering the imperial cause. The theory in question was that of the perpetuity of the Holy Roman Empire, with its divinely recognised centre at Rome. Even at the courts of the despots, whose practical sagacity was creating the first modern states with their elaborate systems of administration, Petrarch, like Dante, loved to brood, with a half-mystical, half-humanistic partiality, upon that perdurable illusion which exercised such an inexplicable charm over the mediæval mind. It was the same craving for an ideal union of

humanity under one consecrated head that led Dante joyfully to hail the coming of Henry VII. In the same great cause,—the defence of the Empire,—Marsiglio of Padua, by far the keenest of the political thinkers of Petrarch's time, composed his extraordinary treatise upon government and the relations of church and state. Longing for the restoration of Rome's supremacy, Petrarch first placed his hopes in Rienzo, and then, after the Tribune's fall, sent message after message to Charles IV., King of Bohemia, the grandson of Dante's imperial hero, exhorting him to have pity upon Italy and widowed Rome.

Mr. Bryce calls Dante's treatise on government an epitaph, not a prophecy. Petrarch, too, was blind to the forces about him which made for political progress. He learned nothing from that race of really great rulers, the Visconti, with whom he was intimately associated. Moreover, the most original and profound work upon government which the Middle Ages produced, the *Defensor Pacis* of Marsiglio of Padua, written in 1324, appears to have exercised no influence upon him, and although he confined his reading to the classics and the writings of the Fathers, his political sympathies and ideals are typically mediæval. In his treatment of these

matters he does not rise above the current argumentation of the Imperialists, although he re-enforces his position with a greater abundance and precision of historical illustration.

Rienzo had found in Petrarch a sympathetic confidant when, as early as 1343, upon visiting Avignon, he had unfolded his audacious schemes to him.[1] When, four years later, at Pentecost, 1347, the innkeeper's son carried out his successful *coup d'état* and got possession of the city of Rome, Petrarch was enchanted, as is shown by the letter given below. The immediate results of Rienzo's accession to power were indeed almost magical: order was restored, the roads were rendered safe for the first time in the memory of man, and an Italian parliament was summoned to consider the unification of Italy. The Tribune's manifestoes aroused universal enthusiasm; and, in spite of the writer's inflated and obscure style, Petrarch pronounced him, long after the spell was broken, a most eloquent and persuasive orator and a graceful writer. Petrarch seemed

[1] Petrarch's letter "to a Friend" (*Ep. sine Titulo*, vii.; also *apud* Fracassetti, *App. Lit.*, No. 2) was doubtless addressed to Rienzo in 1343, and expresses the enthusiasm which he felt upon first meeting him.

to see his own dreams realised; the ancient dignity and ascendancy of Rome were re-established; the foreign tyrants, as he called the Roman nobility, including the Colonnesi, had been expelled; the power was once more in the hands of the divinely elected people of Rome. Rome was soon to be the head of a unified and rejuvenated Italy, perhaps of a redeemed Europe. By November Petrarch was on his way to join Rienzo. He was probably actuated to some extent, however, by his desire to see Italy once more, and to escape from the reproaches of his former friends at the papal court, especially of Giovanni Colonna, whose favour he necessarily sacrificed by his public espousal of Rienzo's cause. But upon his reaching Genoa, letters forwarded to him from Avignon brought the sad story of the Tribune's fatal indiscretions. He thereupon gave up the idea of going to Rome, and contented himself with addressing a sharp reprimand to the delinquent ruler, to whom he recalled the truth: *Magnus enim labor est magnæ custodia famæ.*[1]

After scarcely seven months of power Rienzo ignominiously retired from the Capitol and fled to the solitudes of the Abruzzi. There, while living the life of a hermit, he was encouraged

[1] *Fam.*, vii., 7.

by prophetic revelations to renew his attempts to establish the Roman power. He determined to conciliate the new Emperor, Charles IV., foreigner as he was, and win him if possible to his fantastic[1] schemes. This strangest of all Italian ambassadors must have reached Prague when Charles was fresh from a perusal of Petrarch's first summons to him, which is given below.[2] The Emperor listened curiously to Rienzo's representations, but instead of joining him in a campaign for the realisation of the ideal Roman Empire he shut up the ex-Tribune as an enemy of the Church, and later turned him over to the pope at Avignon. Petrarch still sympathised with the unfortunate captive, and prepared an appeal to the Roman people in his favour.[3] After a brief return to a restricted exercise of power as senator under the papal control, Rienzo was killed by a mob, October 8, 1354.[4]

[1] *Fantastic* is the adjective applied to Rienzo, even by contemporaries. Giovanni Villani (xii., 90) says that the more thoughtful judged that "la dita impreso del tribuno era un opera *fantastica* e da poco durare." The author of the *Vita di Cola di Rienzo* refers to his *fantastic* smile.

[2] See pp. 361 *sqq.*

[3] Given below, pp. 348 *sqq.*

[4] The chief source for the life of Rienzo is the *Vita di Cola di Rienzo* by an unknown author (*apud* Muratori's *Antiquitates*, and in a modern edition, Florence, 1854). Gregorovius gives a charming account of Cola in the sixth volume of his *Geschichte der Stadt Rom.*

Petrarch's letters to Rienzo do not simply show an absorbing interest in the attempt of a national leader to restore the ancient prestige of Rome and to establish the unity of Italy; they seem to prove that there was a fundamental congruity, a spiritual affinity—*Wahlverwandtschaft* [1]—between the two men, which would have made them firm friends had they been brought together. One,[2] at least, of the eight letters of Petrarch to Rienzo which have been preserved is strikingly free from constraint, and would lead us to believe that the poet, on his part, was anxious that their relations should be those of cordial familiarity. The letter which follows gives us some notion of the widespread interest aroused by the Tribune's first acts.

To Cola di Rienzo, Tribune of the Roman People.[3]

I shall continue to write to you every day, not from any hope of a reply,—for, in view of your heavy and varied cares, I must admit that while I long for an answer I can hardly expect one,—but rather that you may be the first to learn what goes on in my mind respecting you, and especially that I may in this way assure you of my deep concern for

[1] *Cf.* Voigt, *op. cit.*, i., p. 52.
[2] *Var.*, 47.
[3] *Var.*, 38. Written in 1347.

your welfare. I clearly perceive, in the first place, that you are set on a high pinnacle, exposed to the gaze, the judgment, and the comments not only of the Italians but of the whole human race; not only of those who are now alive but of those who shall be born in all the centuries to come. I realise, too, that you have assumed a heavy but a splendid and honourable responsibility, and undertaken a task at once glorious and unique. Never will our own generation, never will posterity, as I believe, cease to think of you. The speech of other men is as idle and discordant as their fleeting whims, but your purpose, no whit less firm than the Capitoline rock upon which you dwell, is one not to be shaken by every breath.

I know not whether you are aware of one thing, or, if so, whether you have given it any thought. You must not imagine that your letters which have hitherto reached us have remained in the hands of those to whom they were addressed. They are promptly copied by everybody with such eagerness, and circulated about the papal corridors with such interest that one would suppose that they came from a celestial being, or a dweller at the antipodes, rather than from one of our own race. At the rumour of a letter from you the whole populace gathers. Never was an utterance of the Delphic Apollo interpreted in so many senses as your words. I cannot but extol your circumspection in maintaining a tone at once so temperate and so free from offence, and I pray most fervently that you will henceforth take greater and greater precautions in

this respect. Your words reflect the noble spirit of the writer and the majesty of the Roman people, without derogating in any way from the reverence and honour due to the Roman pontiff. It beseems your wisdom and eloquence to be able so to associate things which appear, but are not in reality, contradictory, that each is given its due weight.[1] I have noted how astonished some have been that the conflict in your letters between modesty and assurance resulted in so equal a contest and so doubtful a victory, for neither cowardly fear nor swelling pride showed themselves in the arena. Men hesitate, I observe, whether to admire most your deeds or your words, since all admit that for your devotion to liberty they may well declare you a Brutus, and for your eloquence, a Cicero,—whom Catullus of Verona calls "most fluent."

Continue, then, as you have begun. Write not only as if everyone were to see your letters, but as if they were to be sent forth from all our shores, and transmitted to every land. You have laid the firmest of foundations, in peace, truth, justice, and liberty; build upon these; for what you raise thereon shall be established, and he who runs upon them shall be dashed to pieces. He who opposes truth shall prove himself a liar; he who opposes peace, a turbulent spirit; he who opposes justice is himself unjust, and he who opposes liberty, arrogant and shameless.

I approve of your custom of keeping copies of all

[1] Rienzo found it impossible in the long run to reconcile his assumption of power with the prerogatives of Rome's papal sovereign.

the letters which you send to various parts of the globe, for these copies are useful in determining what you should say by what you have already said, and they enable you, when it is necessary, to compare the letters of others with your own. That you do this is proved to me by the manner in which you dated your letter. Your magnificent subscription, moreover, "in the first year of the Republic's freedom," smacks of the intent to begin our annals anew. The expression delights and comforts me. And since you are wholly engaged in action, and until you discover a genius equal to the affair, I tender you, unless God . . . [1], my little skill and this pen of mine, as Livy says, to uphold the memory of the people who rule the earth; nor will my *Africa* disdain to give place a little. Farewell.

The following letter, written some five years after Rienzo's *coup d'état*, is not only important for its references to the ex-Tribune's reception at Avignon, but it enables us to judge how the whole affair appeared to Petrarch after his friend's disgrace.

Rienzo under the Protection of the Muses.

To Francesco Nelli.[2]

What do you expect me to tell you now?—something more of the episode in my last letter, which

[1] A word is apparently missing here in the MS.

[2] *Fam.*, xiii., 6. This letter was probably written in 1352.

may equally well have brought indignant tears to your eyes or made you laugh?' At this moment I certainly have nothing more important on hand, although there are plenty of trifling duties. Indeed, lack of time prevents my turning to more weighty matters, and even what little time I have is not really free, but is filled with astonishing interruptions. I am in a constant hubbub, always in motion, running here, there, and nowhere.[2] This is an ill that is all too familiar to those who move from place to place. Having left Babylon[3] for the last time, I am now at the Fountain of the Sorgue, my usual port of refuge from the storms that overtake me. Here I am waiting for travelling companions, as well as for late autumn, or at least for that season when, as Virgil hath it, "the shortening days bring a waning heat." In the meantime, that my country life may not be wholly profitless, I am gathering together the results of past meditation. Every day I try either to make some progress in the more important writings which I have in hand or to finish outright some one little thing. This letter will show you what I am doing to-day.

Poetry, a divine gift which belongs of necessity to the few, is now beginning to be usurped, not to say profaned and degraded, by the many. To me there is nothing more irritating than this, and if I

[1] This refers to an account of the refusal to grant Petrarch a papal secretaryship because of his too elegant Latin. See above, p. 118.

[2] The Latin—Nam et ego totus in motu, et multa circumstrepunt, simulque hic et alibi, atque ita nusquam, sum—forcibly expresses what is often supposed to be a quite modern experience.

[3] *I. e.*, Avignon.

know your disposition, my friend, you will find it no less hard than I to reconcile yourself to this unbecoming state of affairs. Never at Athens or Rome, never in the times of Homer or Virgil, was there such an ado about poets as we have now on the banks of the Rhone; although I believe there was never a place or a time when the knowledge of these matters was at so low an ebb. But I would have you smother your irritation in a laugh, and learn to jest even in the midst of sadness.

Cola di Rienzo has recently come, or rather been brought, a prisoner, to the papal curia. He who was once the Tribune of the city of Rome, inspiring terror far and wide, is now the most miserable of men, and, what is worst of all, I fear that, miserable as he undoubtedly is, he ought scarcely to arouse our pity, since he who might have died with glory upon the Capitol has submitted to be imprisoned, first by a Bohemian and then by a native of Limoges,[1] thus bringing derision upon himself and upon the Roman name and state. How active my pen was in praising and admonishing this man is perhaps better known than I should wish. I was enamoured of his virtue; I applauded his design, and admired his spirit; I congratulated Italy, and anticipated a restoration of dominion to the mother city, and peace for the whole world. I could not disguise the joy that such hopes engendered, and it seemed to me that I should become a participant in all this glory if I could but urge him on in his course.

[1] Namely, by Emperor Charles IV. and Pope Clement VI. *Cf.* Papencordt, *Rienzi*, 254, n. 1.

That he keenly felt the incentive of my words his letters and messages amply testified. This aroused me the more, and incited me to discover what would serve to inflame further his fervid spirit; and, as I well knew that nothing causes a generous heart to glow like praise and renown, I disseminated enthusiastic eulogies, which may have seemed exaggerated to some, but which were in my opinion perfectly justified. I commended his past actions, and exhorted him to persevere in the future. Some of my letters to him are still preserved, and I am not altogether ashamed of them. I am not addicted to prophecy; would that he, too, had refrained from it! Moreover, at the time when I wrote, what he had done and what he seemed about to do was worthy not only of my admiration but of that of the whole human race. I doubt whether these letters should be destroyed for the single reason that he preferred to live a coward rather than die with dignity. But it is useless to discuss the impossible; however anxious I might be to destroy them I cannot, for they are now in the hands of the public, and so have escaped from my control.

But to return to our subject. He who had filled evil-doers throughout the world with trembling apprehension, and the good with glad hope and anticipation, approached the papal court humbled and despised. He who had once been attended by the whole Roman people and the chiefs of the Italian cities was now accompanied by two guards only, one on either side, as he made his unhappy way through the people, who crowded about him in their

eagerness to see the face of one of whom they had only heard the proud name.[1] . . . In this plight, as I understand from the letters of friends, one hope is left him; a rumour has spread among the people that he is an illustrious poet. It seems to them a shameful thing that one devoted to so sacred a pursuit should suffer violence. The elevated sentiment that now prevails with the crowd is the same to which Cicero once appealed before the magistrates, in favour of his teacher, Aulus Licinius Archias. But I need not add a description of the oration, which I formerly fetched from farthest Germany when travelling through that region as an eager sight-seer in my early days. During the year following my return, in response to the desires of your friends, I sent it to our native city. That you have it and have read it carefully I can see from the letters which reach me from there. But what shall I say of Rienzo's affair? I am delighted, and rejoice more than words can tell, that such honour is now rendered to the Muses, and—what is the more astonishing—by those who are unacquainted with them; so that they are able to save by their name alone a man otherwise hateful even to his very judges. What more exalted prerogatives could they have enjoyed under Augustus Cæsar, at a time when they were held in supreme honour, when poets came from all parts

[1] In the portion of the letter here omitted Petrarch laments Rienzo's inconstancy and want of insight, and dwells upon the fact that he is accused not of having deserted a noble cause but of having dared to contemplate a free republic. The same sentiments are expressed in the letter which follows this.

to look upon the illustrious countenance of that unique prince who was at once their friend and the ruler of the earth? What greater tribute, I ask, could be paid to the power of the Muses than that they should be permitted to snatch from death's door a man certainly detested,—with how much reason I will not discuss,—a convicted and confessed criminal (even if not guilty of the offence of which he is accused), about to be condemned by the unanimous vote of his judges to capital punishment. I am delighted, again I say it; I congratulate both him and the Muses,—him upon the protection he enjoys, them upon the honour in which they are held. Nor do I grudge an offender, reduced to his last hope and in such critical circumstances, this saving title of poet.

Yet if you asked my opinion I should say that Cola di Rienzo is very eloquent, possessed of great powers of persuasion, and ready of speech; as a writer also he is charming and elegant, his diction, if not very copious, is graceful and brilliant. I believe, too, that he reads all the poets that are generally known; but he is not a poet for all that, any more than one is a weaver who dons a garment made by another's hands. Even the writing of verses does not suffice by itself to earn the title of poet. As Horace most truly says,

> 'T is not enough then merely to inclose
> Plain sense in numbers,—which if you transpose,
> The words were such as any man might say.[1]

[1] Howes' version of *Sat.*, i., 4, 42.

But this man has never composed a single poem which has reached my ears, nor has he applied himself to such things; and without application nothing, however easy, can be well done.

I wished to tell you all this in order that you first might be moved by the fate of one who was once a public benefactor, and then might rejoice in his unexpected deliverance. You will, like me, be equally amused and disgusted by the cause of his escape, and will wonder, if Cola—which God grant! —can, in such imminent peril, find shelter beneath the ægis of the poet, why Virgil should not escape in the same way? Yet he would certainly have perished at the hands of the same judges, because he is held to be not a poet but a magician. But I will tell you something which will amuse you still more. I myself, than whom no one has ever been more hostile to divination and magic, have occasionally been pronounced a magician by quite as acute judges, on account of my fondness for Virgil. How low indeed have our studies sunk![1] . . .

The treatment of Rienzo by the papal officials at Avignon seemed to Petrarch an insult to the Roman people; and he determined, shortly after the prisoner's arrival, to appeal to those who had once shared in the Tribune's

[1] The letter closes with a last illustration of the prevailing ignorance. A highly talented and well-educated man (vir litterarum multarum et excelsi ingenii) of Avignon gravely asked Petrarch if a certain person, who could make a public speech and write a letter with some ease, might not properly be called a *poet*.

fleeting glory. Petrarch's interest in the case may very well be ascribed, in part at least, to his former friendship for Rienzo; his letter is, however, chiefly important as illustrating his political ideas and his highly fantastic conception of the Roman Empire.

To the Roman People, urging them to Intervene in Rienzo's Trial.[1]

Invincible people, to whom I belong, Conquerors of the Nations! there is a grave question which I would discuss with you, briefly and in confidence. I pray you therefore, I conjure you, illustrious men, to grant me your attention, for yours are the interests at stake. It is a serious matter, a most serious matter, with which none other in the world can be compared. But lest I should exhaust your interest by delay, or seem to endeavour to give added weight to a matter that by its very nature is of supreme importance, I will omit any introduction and come at once to the point.

Your former Tribune is now a captive in the power of strangers, and—sad spectacle indeed!—like a nocturnal thief or a traitor to his country, he pleads his cause in chains. He is refused the opportunity of a legitimate defence by the highest of earthly tribunals. The magistrates of justice themselves reject the claims of justice, and deny him what has never been denied to even the most impious

[1] *Ep. sine Titulo*, iv. (Also in Fracassetti's *App. Lit.*, No. 1.)

offenders.[1] It is true that he may perhaps deserve to suffer in this manner, for, after he had planted the Republic by his skill, with his own hands so to speak, after it had taken root and flowered, in the very bloom of glorious success he left it. But Rome assuredly does not merit such treatment. Her citizens, who were formerly inviolable by law and exempt from punishment, are now indiscriminately maltreated, as anyone's savage caprice may dictate, and this is done not only without the guilt that attaches to a crime, but even with the high praise of virtue.

But that you may not be ignorant, most illustrious sirs, why he who was formerly your head and guide and is still your fellow-citizen—or shall I say your exile?—is thus persecuted, I must dwell upon a circumstance of which you may already be aware, but which is none the less astounding and intolerable. He is accused not of betraying but of defending liberty; he is guilty not of surrendering but of holding the Capitol. The supreme crime with which he is charged, and which merits expiation on the scaffold, is that he dared affirm that the Roman Empire is still at Rome, and in possession of the Roman people. Oh impious age! Oh preposterous jealousy, malevolence unprecedented! What doest thou, O Christ, ineffable and incorruptible judge of all? Where are thine eyes with which thou art wont to scatter the clouds of human misery? Why dost thou turn them away? Why dost thou

[1] Rienzo was accused of heresy, and it was quite in accord with the jurisprudence of the inquisition to refuse him counsel.

not, with thy forked lightning, put an end to this unholy trial? Even though we be not deserving, look upon us, have pity upon us! Behold our enemies (who are not less thine), for they are multiplied, and they hate us even as they hate thee, with a cruel hate. Judge, we beseech thee, between our cause and theirs, unlike in every respect. From thy mouth let our judgment go forth; let thine eyes behold equity.

That one nation, or indeed that all nations, as we perceive, should have desired to withdraw themselves from that easiest and most just of all yokes, the yoke of Rome, need not surprise nor anger us, since there is in the souls of all mortals an innate love of liberty. Inadvisable and premature this desire may often be, and those whom shame forbids to obey their superiors ofttimes command but ill, and might better have submitted to be led. In this way all things are thrown into a state of turmoil and confusion; and in place of a suitable dominion we not infrequently find an unworthy subjection; instead of a dignified subordination, an unjust authority. Were this otherwise, human affairs would be upon a better footing, and the world, its head erect, would be vigorous still.

If this cannot be accepted upon my authority, experience may be trusted. When have we seen such peace, such tranquillity, such justice, such glory of well-doing, such rewards for virtue, such punishments for evil,—when did such order reign in all things, as when the world had but a single head, and that head Rome? It was that time which

God, who loves peace and justice, chose above all others to humble himself to be born of the Virgin and to visit our earth. To each body is given its respective head; so the whole world, which the poet calls "the great body," should content itself with a single temporal head. A creature with two heads is a monster; how much more horrid and frightful a prodigy is a being with a thousand separate heads, wrangling among themselves and tearing each other. But if there must be several heads, there certainly should be one which is above the others and controls everything, so that the whole body may remain at peace. It is a truth amply proved by innumerable experiences, and supported by the authority of the most learned, that in heaven and on earth unity of rule has always been best. That God Omnipotent has willed that the supreme head should be no other than Rome, he has shown by a thousand signs, for he has rendered Rome worthy, by the glory of both peace and war, and has granted her a preëminence of power, marvellous and unexampled.

Although this be true, yet if in the past a nation, following the custom of the human heart, which daily rejoices in its own evil, has, as I have said, chosen to embrace a harmful and doubtful liberty rather than accept the safe and advantageous dominion of the common mother, it may still be pardoned for its audacity or stupidity. But who can, without scandal, hear the question raised among learned men whether the Roman Empire is at Rome? Must we assume, then, that the Parthian,

the Persian, and the Median kingdoms remain with the Parthians, the Persians, and the Medes, respectively, but that the Roman Empire wanders about? Who can stomach such an absurdity? Who will not, rather, vomit it up and utterly reject it? If the Roman Empire is not at Rome, pray where is it? If it is anywhere else than at Rome it is no longer the Empire of the Romans, but belongs to those with whom an erratic fate has left it. Although the Roman generals were, owing to the exigencies of the Republic, often engaged with their armies in the far east or extreme west, or found themselves in the regions of Boreas or of Auster, the Roman dominion in the meantime was at Rome, and Rome it was which determined whether the Roman generals merited reward or punishment. It was determined upon the Capitol who should be honoured, who punished, who should enter the city as a private citizen, who with the honours of an ovation or of a triumph. Even after the tyranny, or, as we prefer to say, the monarchy, of Julius Cæsar was established, the Roman rulers, although they were assigned a place in the council of the gods themselves, continued, as we well know, to ask the consent of the Senate or of the Roman people in the conduct of the government, and according as that permission was granted or refused they proceeded with, or desisted from, their proposed action. Emperors may, therefore, wander about, but the Empire is fixed and forever immovable. And we may well infer that it was no temporary site but its eternal place to which Virgil refers when he says:

While on the rock-fast Capitol Æneas' house abides,
And while the Roman Father still the might of Empire guides.[1]

. . . It was, however, also a Roman who wrote, "All that is born dies, and that which increases grows old." Nor does it distress me that Fortune exercises her prerogatives in your case as well as in that of others, and, in order plainly to show that she is mistress of human affairs, fears not to lay hands upon the very head of the world. I well know her violence and her inconstancy. Still, I cannot endure the idle boasts of certain unbridled nations, and the insolent conduct of those whose neck long bore the yoke of Rome. To pass over many other outrageous themes of discussion, they raise the question—oh, unhappy and shameful suggestion!—whether the Roman Empire is at Rome.

It is indeed true that upon a spot now covered with trackless forest royal palaces may some time arise; and where to-day stand halls resplendent with gold, the hungry flocks may some time pasture, and the wandering shepherds occupy the apartments of kings. I do not depreciate the power of Fortune. As she has obliterated other cities, so, with no more effort, if with greater ruin, she may destroy the

[1] *Æneid*, ix., 448, 449, as translated by William Morris. Petrarch here makes an excursus in order to free Virgil from the reproach of Augustine, who asserts that the poet mendaciously promises (*Æneid*, i., 278, 279) the Romans an endless empire. These words, Petrarch points out, were discreetly put into Jove's mouth, whereas, when speaking for himself, Virgil refers (*Georgics*, ii., 498) to *res Romanæ perituraque regna*.

queen of cities. Alas, she has already partially accomplished this; but she can never bring it about that the Roman Empire can be anywhere else than at Rome, for as soon as it is anywhere else it ceases to be Roman.

This your unfortunate fellow-citizen has maintained, and will not deny that he still maintains; and this constitutes the terrible crime for which his life is endangered. He claims that his assertion is based upon the opinion of many wise men, nor do I think that he is wrong. He further entreats that counsel and the opportunity to defend himself be granted him. This is refused; and, without divine mercy and your support, he is undone; innocent and defenceless, he will be condemned.

Almost everyone pities him; there is scarcely one who is not distressed for him, except those whose duty it is to be compassionate, to forgive the erring, and to feel no envy toward virtue. Distinguished lawyers are not wanting here who claim that this same proposition can be most clearly proved by the civil law. Others maintain that they could cite many and weighty references in the histories, which go to substantiate this opinion, if it were only permitted them to speak freely. But no one now dares to hint a word of this, except in a corner, or timidly and in secret. Even I who write this to you, although I might not refuse to die for the truth, if my death would seem to promise any advantage to the Republic,—even I now keep my peace, and do not affix my name to this present communication, believing that the style itself will suffice to indicate

the writer, though I may add that it is a Roman citizen who speaks.[1] But if the matter should be considered in a place of safety, before a just judge, and not in the tribunal of our enemies, I hope, with the truth illuminating my intellect, and God directing my speech or pen, to be able to say that which will render it clearer than day that the Roman Empire, although long wasted and oppressed by the attacks of fortune, and occupied in turn by Spaniards, Africans, Greeks, Gauls, and Germans, still exists; that it is at Rome, not elsewhere; and that it will always remain there, although absolutely nothing of that great city should be left except the naked rock of the Capitol. I will prove, further, that even before we were ruled by foreigners, and while the Roman Cæsars still held the power, all the authority of the Empire was lodged, not in them, but in the citadel of the Capitol and in the Roman people.[2] . . .

Bear such aid, then, as you can and ought, to your Tribune, or, if that title is extinguished, to your fellow-citizen, who has merited well at the hands of the Republic; first and foremost, because he has raised a great and important question which had been lost sight of and neglected for centuries, and which indicates the only means toward a reformation of the state and the ushering in of the golden age. Succour this man! Do not neglect the safety of one

[1] Petrarch had been made a citizen of Rome at the time of his coronation.

[2] Petrarch, in the passage which follows, urges the Romans to procure the transfer of Rienzo's case to Rome, or at least to demand that he shall be granted a public audience and a fair trial.

who has incurred a thousand perils and subjected himself to eternal despite in your behalf. Consider his spirit and his purpose, and remember the former state of your affairs, and how quickly the advice and efforts of a single man excited a wonderful hope, not only in Rome, but throughout Italy. Remember how speedily the Italian name and the glory of Rome were elevated and purified; remember the fear and disappointment of your enemies, the joy of your friends, the anticipations of the people; how the course of events was altered, how the whole universe assumed a new aspect, and the disposition of men's minds was changed. Among all the revolutions under heaven none has been so wonderful and astounding as this. For seven months, not longer, he held the reins of the Republic by an effort which in my judgment finds scarcely a parallel in the whole history of the world; and had he continued as he began he would have accomplished a divine rather than a human work. Indeed, whatever man does well is the work of God. There is, then, no doubt that this man, who is known to have acted for your glory and not to satisfy his own ambition, deserves your favour. You must blame Fortune for the outcome. If his original fervour gave way to a certain lethargy, forgive this in the name of human inconstancy and weakness, and save your fellow-citizen while you may from his enemies; you, who formerly protected the Greeks from the Macedonians, the Sicilians from the Carthaginians, the Campanians from the Samnites, and the Etrurians from the Gauls, and that not without serious peril to yourselves.

Your resources are, I confess, no longer what they once were, but never did your fathers show such valour as when Roman poverty, which forms the wealth of virtue, flourished. Your power is less, that I do not forget; but believe me, if a drop of the old blood still flows in your veins, you may yet enjoy no little majesty and no trifling authority. Venture somewhat, I adjure you, in memory of past greatness, in the name of the ashes and fame of your ancestors, in the name of the Empire, in the name of Jesus Christ, who bade us love our neighbour and aid the afflicted. Have courage, I beseech you, above all in a matter where your petition is honourable, and silence shameful and unbecoming. If not for his welfare, dare to do something for the sake of your own reputation, if you would still count for anything. There is nothing less Roman than fear. I forewarn you that if you are afraid, if you despise yourselves, others, too, will despise you; no one will fear you. But if you once begin to desire not to be scorned you will be feared far and wide, as has often been proved in the past, and but lately, also, when that ruler to whom I refer was governing the Republic. You have but to speak as one; let the world recognise that the Roman people has but a single voice, and no one will reject or scorn their words; everyone will respect or fear them. Claim the captive, or demand justice; one or the other will be conceded to you. And you, who once by a trifling embassy freed a King of Egypt besieged by the Syrians, free now your fellow-citizen from a shameful prison.

Some two years after Rienzo's retirement, Petrarch addressed his first letter to Charles of Bohemia, who already enjoyed the title of King of the Romans, but had not yet been crowned Emperor at Rome, as was then customary. While we cannot attempt to analyse the anomalous character of this historically important personage, it will nevertheless be readily and justly inferred that little real sympathy could exist between our ardent southern *doctrinaire* and the sober northern ruler. Petrarch was too thoroughly Italian really to respect Charles personally. He could never place unreserved confidence in a German from the cold north, "where there is no noble ardour or vital heat of empire."[1] To his fellow-countryman, Rienzo, he had been drawn both by the hope of seeing Rome once more supreme and, as we have seen, by natural affinity, and a common fiery enthusiasm for the mighty lessons of antiquity. Charles enlisted his interest only as the titular successor of the Cæsars. The vitality, and, it must be admitted, the absurdity, of Petrarch's political theories are clearly seen in his long correspondence with the Emperor. He clung to his ideal with such tenacity that he continued to despatch appeal

[1] *Fam.*, xx., 2 (vol. iii., p. 9).

after appeal across the Alps, in spite of deluded hopes and disappointments which might well have appeared decisive.[1]

The letters shed little or no light upon the conditions of the times, or upon the interrelations of the Italian states. We hear of Veii and of the Samnites, but the writer passes over the more pertinent Florence and the Visconti in silence. In one instance only does he refer to existing conditions. The success of Rienzo is cited with a hope of rousing the King's emulation.[2] If Peace and Justice and their inseparable companions, Good Faith and sweet Security, returned at the call of the Tribune, how much might not justly be expected from the spell of the imperial name? Charles was to free the Italians from slavery, to reinstate justice, now prostituted to avarice, and once more to bring back peace, long fallen into utter oblivion.[3] No more complete or specific program is offered; the poet satisfies himself with the constant reiteration of the eternal fitness of Rome's headship. This had satisfied many generations of political writers; it is the central idea

[1] The senselessness of anticipating good from the arrival of the Emperor is bitterly dwelt upon in *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ*, book i., chap. 116.

[2] *Fam.*, xviii. (vol. ii., p. 464).

[3] *Fam.*, xviii. (vol. ii., p. 468).

of mediæval thought, whether in the field of secular or ecclesiastical political speculation. Petrarch adds nothing to it, and the chief interest in his messages is, perhaps, their conservatism. His study of the classics did not modify but served only to intensify the current conception. For him there was no mean between the traditional anachronism of a world-monarchy and the petty, unscrupulous, restless despotisms about him.

In one respect, however, Petrarch advanced beyond the fruitless repetition of old fantastic theory, for he viewed Charles not only as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire but as a new Augustus, a patron of literature. Upon receiving a letter from his royal friend he exclaims, "If it was deemed a glorious thing for Virgil and Horace to gain the notice and companionship of Cæsar Augustus and to receive his letters, why should not I, their successor, not indeed in merit but in time, and perhaps in the opinion of men,—why should not I feel justly proud to be similarly distinguished by Augustus' successor?"[1] The tribute here implied to the Emperor's interest in letters was by no means entirely unmerited. Petrarch, as we have repeatedly seen, was strongly attached

[1] *Fam.*, xxiii., 2 (vol. iii., p. 184).

to the rulers of his day, in whom he either discovered, or quickly aroused, a certain enthusiasm for the new culture. They came to relish the society of men of letters, and to extend to them their princely patronage, during the long humanistic epoch of which he was the herald.

To Charles IV., Emperor August of the Romans.[1]

My letter, most serene Emperor, when it considers its origin, whence it proceeds and whither it is bound, is filled with dread at the thought of the gulf over which it must pass. Born in the shadow of obscurity, what wonder if it is dazzled by the brilliancy of your splendid name? But love casteth out fear: it will, as it ventures into the light of your presence, at least serve to bear to you the message of my faithful affection. Read, then, I pray you, Glory of our Age, read! for you need fear no empty flattery, that common affliction of kings, so irksome and hateful to you. The art of adulation is repugnant to my character; prepare rather to listen to my lamentations, for you are now to be disturbed not by compliments but by complaints.

Why do you forget us—nay, forget yourself, if I may be pardoned for so speaking? How is it that your Italy no longer enjoys your watchful care?

[1] *Fam.*, x., 1. This letter may with confidence be dated Padua, Feb. 24, 1350. *Cf.* Gregorovius, *op. cit.*, vi., 341.

We have long placed our hope in you, as one sent to us from heaven, who would speedily re-establish our liberty; but you have forsaken us, and, when action is most essential, you occupy your time in lengthy deliberations. — You will perceive, Cæsar, how frankly I dare to address you, though a person insignificant and unknown. Be not offended at my boldness, I beseech you, but congratulate yourself upon the possession of a nature which can arouse this confidence in me.

To revert to the question in hand, why do you spend your time in mere consultation, as if master of the future? Do you not know how abruptly the most important matter may reach a crisis? A day may bring forth what has been preparing for centuries. Believe me, if you but consider your own reputation, and the condition of the state, you will clearly perceive that neither your interests nor ours require longer delay. What is more fleeting and uncertain than life? Although you are now at the height of manly vigour, your strength will not endure, but is slipping from you steadily and apace. Each day carries you insensibly toward old age. You hesitate and look about you; ere you are aware, your hair will be white. Can you apprehend that you are premature in undertaking a task for which, as you must know, the longest life would scarcely suffice? The business before you is no common or trifling affair. The Roman Empire, long harassed by storms, and again and again deluded in its hopes of safety, has at last placed its waning reliance in your uprightness and devotion. After a thousand perils, it ventures,

under the protection of your name, to breathe once more; but hope alone cannot long sustain it. You must realise how great and how holy a burden of responsibility you have assumed. Press on, we exhort you, to the goal, with the utmost speed!

Time is so precious, nay, so inestimable a possession, that it is the one thing which the learned agree can justify avarice. So cast hesitation to the winds and, as behooves one who is entering upon a momentous task, count every day a priceless opportunity. Let this thought make you frugal of time, and induce you to come to our rescue, and show the light of your august countenance, for which we long amidst the clouds of our adversity. Let not solicitude for Transalpine affairs, nor the love of your native soil, detain you; but whenever you look upon Germany, think of Italy. There you were born, here you were nurtured; there you enjoy a kingdom, here both a kingdom and an empire; and, as I believe I may, with the consent of all nations and peoples, safely add, while the members of the Empire are everywhere, here you will find the head itself. There must, however, be no slothfulness if you would reach the desired result, for it will prove no small matter to re-unite all these precious fragments into a single body.

I well know that novelty always excites suspicion, but you are not summoned to an unknown land. Italy is no less familiar to you than Germany itself. Pledged to us by divine favour from your childhood, you followed, with extraordinary ability, the

footsteps of your illustrious father.[1] Under his guidance you made yourself acquainted with the Italian cities, the customs of the people, the configuration of the land, and mastered in this way the first principles of your glorious profession. Here, while still a boy, and with a prowess more than mortal, you gained many a famous victory. Yet great as were these deeds they but foreshadowed greater things; since, as a man, you could not look with apprehension upon a country which had afforded you, as a youth, the opportunity for such signal triumphs. You could forecast from the auspicious results of your first campaign what you might, as Emperor, anticipate upon the same field.

Moreover, Italy has never awaited the coming of any foreign prince with more joy; for not only is there no one else to whom she can look for the healing of her wounds, but your yoke she does not regard as that of an alien. Thus your majesty, although you may not be aware of it, enjoys a peculiar position in our eyes.—Why should I fear to say frankly what I think, and what will, I am confident, appear to you as true?—By the marvellous favour of God our own national character is once more restored to us, after so many centuries, in you, our Augustus. Let the Germans claim you for themselves, if they please; we look upon you as an Italian. Hasten then, as I have so often said, and must continue to say, hasten! I know that the

[1] That is, King John of Bohemia, who perished romantically in the battle of Crécy. He made an expedition into Italy in 1329, to which Petrarch here refers.

acts of the Cæsars delight you,—and rightly, for you are one of them. The founder of the Empire moved, it is reported, with such rapidity that he often arrived before the messengers sent to announce his coming. Follow his example. Strive to rival in deeds him whom you equal in rank. Do not longer deprive Italy, which deserves well of you, of your presence. Do not cool our enthusiasm by continued delay and the despatch of messengers. It is you whom we desire, it is your celestial countenance that we ask to behold. If you love virtue (I address our Charles as Cicero addressed Julius Cæsar), and thirst for glory—for you will not disclaim this thirst, wise though you be—do not, I beseech you, shun exertion. For he who escapes effort escapes both glory and virtue, which are never attained but by a steep and laborious path. Arise then and gird up your loins, for we know you to be eager for true praise and ready for noble toil.

You will rightly place the heaviest burdens in this mighty undertaking upon the strongest backs, and upon those in the prime of life, for youth is the suitable time for work, old age for repose. Surely there is among all your important and sacred duties none more pressing than that you should restore gentle peace once more to Italy. This task alone is worthy of your manly strength; others are too slight to occupy so great and generous a spirit. Do this first, and the rest will find an appropriate time. Indeed, I cannot but feel that little or nothing would remain to be done when peace and order were again established in Italy.

Picture to yourself the Genius of the city of Rome, presenting herself before you. Imagine a matron, with the dignity of age, but with her grey locks dishevelled, her garments rent, and her face overspread with the pallor of misery; and yet with an unbroken spirit, and unforgetful of the majesty of former days, she addresses you as follows: "Lest thou shouldst angrily scorn me, Cæsar, know that once I was powerful, and performed great deeds. I ordained laws, and established the divisions of the year. I taught the art of war. I maintained myself for five hundred years in Italy; then, as many a witness will testify, I carried war and victory into Asia, Africa, and Europe, finally compassing the whole world, and by gigantic effort, by wisdom and the shedding of much blood, I laid the foundation of the rising Empire.[1] . . . At last the ocean, which I had dyed with the blood of both my enemies and my children, was subjected to our fleets, in order that from the seeds of war the flower of perpetual peace might spring; and by the work of many hands the Empire might be so established that it should endure until thy time. Nor was I disappointed in my hopes; my wish was granted, and I beheld everything beneath my feet. But then, I know not why, unless it is not fitting that the works of mortals should prove themselves immortal, my magnificent structure fell a prey to sloth and indifference.

"I need not relate again the sad story of its de-

[1] A page is here omitted which briefly reviews the gradual extension of the Roman power.

cline; thou canst behold the state to which it is reduced. Thou, who hast been chosen to succour me when hope had well-nigh deserted me, why dost thou loiter, why dost thou vainly hesitate and consider? Assuredly, I never stood in more dire need of assistance, nor hast thou ever been better placed to bear aid. Never was the Roman pontiff more mildly inclined, nor the favour of God and man more propitious; never did greater deeds await the doing. Dost thou still defer? Delay has always been most fatal to great princes. Would that thou mightest be moved to emulate the illustrious example of those who left nothing for old age, but straightway grasped an opportunity which might offer itself but once. Alexander of Macedon had at thine age traversed the whole Orient, and, burning to extend his kingdom over alien races, knocked at the gates of India. Dost thou, who wouldst only recover thine own, hesitate to enter thy devoted Italy? At thine age Scipio Africanus crossed into Africa, in spite of the adverse counsels of older men, and supported with pious hands an empire tottering upon the verge of ruin. With an incredible display of valour he freed me from the impending yoke of Carthage. His was a mighty task, and, by reason of its unheard-of dangers, memorable to all generations. While war was bitterly waging in our country he invaded the land of the enemy. Hannibal, conqueror of Italy, Gaul, and Spain (who was already contemplating, in his dreadful ambition, the dominion of the whole earth), Scipio cast out of Italy and vanquished upon his own soil. But thou hast no seas to cross nor a

Hannibal to defeat; the way is free from difficulty, all is open and accessible. Should obstacles present themselves, as some fear, thy presence will shatter them as with a thunderbolt. A vast field of fresh glory spreads out before thee, if thou dost not refuse to enter it. Press bravely, confidently forward. God, the companion and present help of the righteous prince, will be with thee. The armed cohorts of the good and upright will gather about thee, demanding to regain under thy leadership their lost liberty.

" I might urge thee on by examples of another character, of those who by death or by some other insuperable check were unable to bring their glorious undertakings to an end. But we need not look abroad for instances when such excellent illustrations are to be had at home. Without searching the annals, a single example, most familiar to thee, will serve for all, that of Henry VII., thy most serene grandfather of glorious memory. Had his life been spared to accomplish what his noble mind had conceived, how different would have been the fate of Italy ! He would have driven his enemies to despair, and would have left me once more queen of a free and happy people. From where he now dwells in heaven he looks down upon thee and considers thy conduct. He counts the days and the hours, and joins me in chiding thy delay.

" ' Beloved grandson,' he pleads, ' in whom the good place their hope, and in whom I seem still to live, listen to our Rome, give heed to her tears and noble prayers. Carry out my plan of reforming the

state, which my death interrupted, working thereby greater harm to the world than to me. Imitate my zeal, fruitless as it was, and mayest thou, with like ardour, bring thy task to a happier and more joyful issue. Begin, lest thou shouldst be prevented; mindful of me, know that thou, too, art mortal. Up, then; surmount the passes! Joyful at thy approach, Rome summons her bridegroom, Italy her saviour, yearning to hear thy footsteps. The hills and rivers await thy coming in glad anticipation; the cities and towns await thee, as do the hearts of all good men. If there were no other motive for thy departure, a sufficient reason would be found in the opinion of evil men, in whose eyes thou canst never linger too long, and in the belief of the good, that thy coming cannot be unduly hastened. For the sake of both, delay no longer; let the virtuous receive their reward; bring retribution upon the evil, or, if they come to their senses, grant them thy forgiveness. To thee alone God Omnipotent has granted the final glory of my interrupted purpose.' "

Charles finally decided that it would be to his advantage to visit Italy and receive the imperial crown at Rome. His motives, however, had little in common with those which are set forth in the preceding letter. He arrived in Lombardy in the autumn of 1354; and after adjusting, temporarily at least, his complicated diplomatic relations with the

states of northern Italy, he called Petrarch to him, in the bitter cold of December.

His Audience with the Emperor.

To "Lælius."[1]

. . . On the fourth day after leaving Milan I arrived at Mantua, where I was received by the successor of our Cæsars with a cordiality hardly to be expected from a Cæsar, and with a graciousness more than imperial. Omitting details, I may say that we two sometimes spent the whole evening, from the time the lights were first lit until an unseasonably late hour of the night, in conversation and discussion. Nothing, in a word, could be more refined and engaging than the dignified manners of this prince. So much, at least, I know; but I must defer a final judgment upon his other traits, in accordance with the dictum of the Satirist, "Trust not the face." We must wait! We must, if I mistake not, take counsel of the acts of the man and their outcome, not of his face and words, if we would determine how far he merits the title of Cæsar. Nor did I hesitate frankly to tell him this.

The conversation happening to descend to my works, the Emperor requested copies of some of them, especially of that one which I have entitled *Lives of Famous Men.* I replied that the latter was still unfinished, and that time and leisure were

[1] *Fam.*, xix., 3. The first part of the letter, describing, among other things, the severe winter cold, is omitted.

necessary to its completion. Upon asking me to agree to send it to him later, he met with an example of my customary freedom of speech when talking with persons of rank. This frankness, which I had by nature, becomes more pronounced as the years go on, and by the time I reach old age it will doubtless exceed all bounds. "I promise that you shall have it," I answered, "if your valour approves itself, and my life is spared." As he asked, in surprise, for an explanation, I replied that as far as I was concerned I might properly demand that a suitable period be granted me for the completion of so considerable a work, as it was especially difficult to set forth the history of great deeds in a limited space. "As for you, Cæsar," I continued, "you will know yourself to be worthy of this gift, and of a book bearing such a title, when you shall be distinguished not in name only, and by the possession of a diadem, insignificant in itself, but also by your deeds; and when, by the greatness of your character, you shall have placed yourself upon a level with the illustrious men of the past. You must so live that posterity shall read of your great deeds as you read of those of the ancients."

That my utterance met with his ready approval was clearly shown by the sparkle of his eye and the inclination of his august head; and it seemed to me that the time had come to carry out something which I had long planned. Following up the opportunity afforded by my words, I presented him with some gold and silver coins, which I held very dear. They bore the effigies of some of our rulers,—

one of them, a most lifelike head of Cæsar Augustus,—and were inscribed with exceedingly minute ancient characters. "Behold, Cæsar, those whose successor you are," I exclaimed, "those whom you should admire and emulate, and with whose image you may well compare your own. To no one but you would I have given these coins, but your rank and authority induces me to part with them. I know the name, the character, and the history, of each of those who are there depicted, but you have not merely to know their history, you must follow in their footsteps;—the coins should, therefore, belong to you." Thereupon I gave him the briefest outline of the great events in the life of each of the persons represented, adding such words as might stimulate his courage and his desire to imitate their conduct. He exhibited great delight, and seemed never to have received a present which afforded him more satisfaction.

But why should I linger upon these details? Among the many things we discussed I will mention only one matter, which will, I think, surprise you. The Emperor desired to hear, in due order, the history—or shall I say the romance?—of my life, from the day of my birth to the present time. Although I protested that the story was long and by no means diverting, he listened to me through it all with grave attention, and when, from forgetfulness or a desire to hasten on, I omitted some event, he straightway supplied it, seeming often to be better acquainted with my past than I myself. I was astonished that any wind was strong enough to have wafted such

trifles across the Alps, and that they had caught the eye of one whose attention was absorbed by the cares of state. When I finally reached the present time in my narrative I paused, but the Emperor pressed me to tell him something of my plans for the future. "Continue," he said; "what of the future? What objects have you now in view?" "My intentions are of the best, Cæsar," I replied, "although I have been unable to bring my work to the state of perfection I should have desired. The habits of the past are strong, and prevail in the conflict with the good intentions of the present. The heart opposes a new determination, as the sea which has been driven by a steady breeze rises up against a contrary wind." "I can well believe you," he answered, "but my question really referred to a different matter, namely, to the kind of life which pleases you best." "The life of solitude," I promptly and boldly answered, "for no existence can be safer, or more peaceful and happy. It transcends, in my opinion, even the glory and eminence of your sovereign position. I love to pursue solitude, when I may, into her own proper haunts, —the forests and mountains. Often in the past have I done this, and when, as at present, it is impossible, I do the best I can, and seek such seclusion as is to be found in the city itself." He smiled, and said, "All this I well know, and have intentionally led you step by step, by my questions, to this confession. While I agree with many of your opinions, I must deprecate this notion of yours."

And so a great discussion arose between us, which

I did not hesitate to interrupt by exclaiming: "Beware, Cæsar, of your course! for in this conflict your arms are by no means equal to mine. This is a debate in which not only are you predestined to defeat, but a very Chrysippus, armed with syllogisms, would have no chance of victory. I have for a long time meditated upon nothing else, and my head is full of arguments and illustrations. Experience, the mistress of the world, sides with me, although the stupid and ignorant multitude oppose my view. I refuse to engage with you, Cæsar, for I should inevitably be declared the victor by any fair-minded person, although he were himself a dweller in the city. Indeed, I am so absorbed by the subject that I have recently issued a little book which treats of some small part of it." Here he interrupted me, declaring that he knew of the book, and that, should it ever fall into his hands, he would promptly commit it to the flames. I told him, in reply, that I should see to it that it never came in his way. Thus our discussion was protracted by many a merry sally, and I must confess that, among all those whom I have heard attack the life of seclusion, I have never found one who advanced more weighty arguments. The outcome was, if I do not deceive myself, that the Emperor was worsted (if it is permissible to say or think that an Emperor can be worsted), both by my arguments and by reason, but in his own opinion he was not only undefeated but remained clearly the victor.

In conclusion, he requested me to accompany him to Rome. This request was, he explained, his

primary motive in subjecting one who held quiet in such esteem to the discomforts of this inclement season. He desired to behold the famous city not only with his own but, so to speak, with my eyes. He needed my presence, he said, in certain Tuscan cities,—of which he spoke in a way that would have led one to believe him an Italian, or possessed, at least, of an Italian mind. This would have been most agreeable to me, and the two words "Rome" and "Cæsar" rang most gratefully in my ears; nothing, I thought, could be more delightful than to accompany Cæsar to Rome; nevertheless I felt obliged, for many good reasons, and owing to unavoidable circumstances, to refuse him.

A new discussion ensued in regard to this matter, which lasted many days and did not end until the last adieux were said. For as the Emperor left Milan I accompanied him to the fifth milestone beyond the walls of Piacenza, and even then it was only after a long struggle of opposing arguments that I could tear myself away. As I was about to depart a certain Tuscan soldier in the imperial guards took me by the hand, and, turning to the Emperor, addressed him in a bold but solemn voice. "Here is he," he said, "of whom I have often spoken to you. If you shall do anything worthy of praise, he will not allow your name to be silently forgotten; otherwise, he will know when to speak and when to keep his peace."

But to return to our first subject.[1] I do not, as

[1] The rumour had reached Lælius that Petrarch had been deputed by the Milanese government to negotiate a peace with Charles.

you can see, repudiate the honour you ascribe to me, because it is distasteful, but because truth is dearer to me than all else. I did not negotiate the peace, though I ardently desired it; I was not deputed to bring it about, but only aided with exhortations and words of encouragement. I was not present at the beginning but only at the close, since Cæsar and my good fortune decreed my presence at the solemn public ratification of the treaty which followed its conclusion.

Assuredly no Italian has ever received such tributes as I have at this juncture. I have been summoned by Cæsar and urged to be his companion; I have been permitted to jest and argue with him. The tyrant Dionysius, as Pliny tells us, once sent a ship covered with garlands to fetch Plato, the disciple of wisdom; and as he disembarked he was received upon the shore by the prince himself, in a chariot drawn by four white horses. These things are spoken of as magnificent tributes to Plato, and as redounding to his glory. You see now, my dear Lælius, whither I am tending, and that I omit no opportunity which promises distinction. What might I not venture, who do not fear to compare myself to Plato? . . .[1]

The hasty, undignified retreat of Charles from Italy, and the bitter reproaches which Petrarch sent after him, did not prevent a re-

[1] The closing paragraph is omitted.

sumption of the intercourse begun in 1350.[1] A year after the Emperor's departure Petrarch went to Prague, as ambassador of the Visconti, but we hear no particulars of his sojourn at that new centre of culture. In a letter written after this visit we find the graceful acknowledgment of the gift of a golden cup from the Emperor, who continued to urge the poet to make his home in Prague. Petrarch at last reluctantly prepared to obey the summons, but was happily prevented by the military occupation of the Alpine passes from undertaking a journey which he little relished. He continued to press the return of the Emperor as Italy's saviour until, finally, "hoarse" with repeated cries for help, he sent his last vain appeal,[2] some ten years after Charles' departure.

[1] Fourteen letters to Charles are preserved in all.

[2] *Fam.*, xxiii., 21.

VI

THE CONFLICT OF MONASTIC AND SECULAR IDEALS

Non sumus aut exhortatione virtutis aut vicinæ mortis obtentu a litteris deterendi.—*Sen.*, i., 4.

THE tendencies toward Paganism which the enthusiastic and exclusive study of the ancient classics produced among the Italian Humanists of the fifteenth century are so well known that it is natural to ask what was the attitude of the founder of Humanism toward the generally accepted religious beliefs of his day.

The question of the propriety of reading pagan works had agitated the Church from the first, and the views of the devout had varied greatly. There had always been distinguished leaders, like Augustine, who made due use of pagan learning and eloquence, and defended a discriminating study of the heathen writers; while others, among whom Gregory the Great was preëminent, had harshly condemned "the idle vanities of secular learning," for the reason "that the same mouth singeth not the praises of Jove and the praises of Christ." Many timid churchmen were fearful, like Jack

[1] *Ep.*, ix., 54.

Cade, of those who talked of "a noun and a verb and such abominable words as no Christian can endure to hear." In short, the effects produced upon the religious convictions by a study of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and Lucretius have always varied with the mental make-up, the maturity and surroundings, of the individual, just as nowadays a study of science may or may not influence the faith of the believer. In notable instances, scientific pursuits not only leave the student's religious system essentially unimpaired but may even serve to fortify a traditional form of theology. On the other hand, an absorbing interest in scientific investigation often produces religious indifference. In still other minds such research will arouse opposition to what comes to seem to them a vicious and degraded form of superstition. This opposition will vary from dignified but uncompromising negation to a frantic belligerency not unlike that of the ecclesiastical opponents of "poetry" in the middle ages.

Turning to Petrarch, we may at first be tempted to infer that his religious beliefs were in no way affected by his sympathetic study of pagan literature. His writings prove beyond a peradventure that he was a devout Catholic,

even an ardent defender of orthodoxy. He composed several devotional works, unimpeachably sound in their teaching, as, for example, the tract upon *True Wisdom*, and his *Penitential Psalms*. He was deeply incensed by the defection of the young men who accepted the doctrines of Averroes, and prepared a refutation of their heresies, as we have seen.[1] And he was no exception to the rule, for there were few, if any, among the first generation of Humanists who affected the paganism characteristic of the later Renaissance.[2] But Petrarch not only refused to question the authority of the Church; he went much farther, and, in theory at least, heartily accepted the prevalent ascetic ideals. He freely acknowledges the superior perfection of the monastic life; it is, he feels, the only sure road to Heaven. In writing to Gherardo, who had become a Carthusian monk, he begs him not to despair of his salvation although he still remains in the world. His sins, however great, are still finite, while the divine clemency upon which he relies is boundless.[3]

But such reflections as fill the letter from

[1] *I. e.*, *De Suiipsius et Multorum Ignorantia*. See above, pp. 215, 216.

[2] *Cf.* Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, vol. i., p. 1 *sqq.*

[3] *Fam.*, x., 3.

which we quote are, the writer explicitly tells us, not his own, for it is the pen of another self, a "monastic pen," which records them. He speaks truly; he had no real love for a consistent life of seclusion and maceration, yet when his spirit was heavy, when the vanity of earthly ambition was more than usually oppressive, he might long for the irresponsible routine of the monastery. Sometimes, too, he seems unconsciously to have confused a scholar's desire for leisure and retirement with the quite different claims of the cloister.[1]

The following letter to Boccaccio explains itself.

Religion does not Require us to Give up Literature.

To Boccaccio.[2]

Your letter, my brother, filled me with the saddest forebodings. As I ran through it amazement and profound grief struggled for the supremacy in my heart, but when I had finished, both gave way to other feelings. As long as I was ignorant of the facts, and attended only to the words, how indeed could I read, with dry eyes, of your tears and ap-

[1] Once, upon his return from a visit to the Carthusian monastery which Gherardo had selected, Petrarch wrote a eulogy of monastic life, *De Otio Religiosorum*, which may be found among his works.

[2] *Sen.*, i., 4.

proaching death ? For at first glance I quite failed to see the real state of affairs. A little thought, however, served to put me in quite a different frame of mind, and to banish both grief and surprise.

But before I proceed I must touch upon the matter to which you refer in the earlier part of your letter. You dare not deprecate, you say with the utmost deference, the plan of your illustrious master —as you too humbly call me—for migrating to Germany, or far-off Sarmatia (I quote your words), carrying with me, as you would have it, all the Muses, and Helicon itself, as if I deemed the Italians unworthy longer to enjoy my presence or the fruits of my labour. You well know, however, that I have never been other than an obscure and lowly dweller on Helicon, and that I have been so distracted by outside cares as to have become by this time almost an exile. I must admit that your method of holding me back from such a venture is more efficacious than a flood of satirical eloquence would have been. I am much gratified by such tokens of your esteem, and by the keen interest you exhibit. I should much prefer to see signs of exaggerated apprehension on your part (*omnia tuta timens*, as Virgil says) than any suggestion of waning affection.

I have no desire to conceal any of my plans from you, dear friend, and will freely tell you the whole secret of my poor wounded heart. I can never see enough of this land of Italy; but, by Hercules! I am so utterly disgusted with Italian affairs that, as I recently wrote to our Simonides, I must confess that

I have sometimes harboured the idea of betaking myself—not to Germany, certainly, but to some secluded part of the world. There I might hope to escape this eternal hubbub, as well as the storms of jealousy to which I am exposed not so much by my lot in life (which to my thinking might rather excite contempt than envy) as by a certain renown which I have acquired in some way or other. Thus secluded I should have done what I could to live an upright life and die a righteous death. This design I should have carried out had not fortune prevented. But as to turning my thoughts northward, that was by no means done with the intention which you imagine. I did not think of seeking repose in that barbarous and uninviting land, with its inclement sky. I was only submitting, from motives of respect and propriety, to the solicitations of our Emperor, who had repeatedly urged me to come and see him, with such insistence that my refusal to visit him, for a short time at least, might have been regarded as an exhibition of pride and rebellion, or even as a species of sacrilege. For, as you have read in Valerius, our ancestors were wont to regard those who could not venerate princes as capable of any form of crime. But you may dismiss your fears, and cease your laments; for—to my not very great regret—I have found this road, too, blocked by war. Anomalously enough, I am glad not to go where I should with even greater gladness have gone if I had been able. To have wished to go is enough to satisfy both my ruler's desires and my own scruples; for the rest fortune was responsible.

Leaving this matter, I come back to that part of your letter which so affected me on first reading. You say that a certain Peter, a native of Sienna, noted for his piety and for the miracles which he performed, has recently died; that on his death-bed, among many predictions relating to various persons, he had something to say of both of us; and that, moreover, he sent a messenger to you to communicate his last words. When you inquired how this holy man, of whom we had never heard, happened to know so much about us, the messenger replied that the deceased had, it is understood, undertaken a certain work of piety; but when, having been told as I surmise that death was near, he saw himself unable to accomplish his proposed mission, he prayed a prayer of great efficacy, which could not fail to make its way to Heaven, that proper substitutes might be designated, who should bring to a successful close the chosen task which it was not the will of God that he himself should complete. With that intimacy of intercourse which exists between God and the soul of the just, Heaven ordained that he should see Christ in person, and thus know that his petition had been heard and granted. And in Christ's face it was conceded to him to read "*the things that are, the things that have been, and the things that are to come*," not as Proteus does in Virgil, but far more perfectly, clearly, and fully; for what could escape one who was permitted to look upon the face of him to whom all things owe their being?

It is certainly a most astounding thing, this seeing

Christ with mortal eyes, if only it be true. For it is an old and much-used device, to drape one's own lying inventions with the veil of religion and sanctity, in order to give the appearance of divine sanction to human fraud. But I cannot pronounce upon this case at present, nor until the messenger of the deceased presents himself to me in person. For you tell me that he visited you first because you were nearest, and, having delivered his message, departed for Naples, intending to go thence by sea to France and England, and lastly to visit me and impart such of his instructions as related to my case. I can then see for myself how much faith he succeeds in arousing in me. I shall closely interrogate everything about him,—his age, face, eyes, dress, bearing, gait, even his tone of voice, movements, style of address, and, above all, his apparent object and the upshot of his discourse.

The gist of the whole matter is then, as I infer, that the holy man as he was dying had a vision of us two, and along with us of several others as well, and intrusted certain secret messages for us all to this zealous and, as he seems to you, faithful executor of his last wishes. Now what messages the other persons may have received we do not know. But you yourself received the following communications, both relating to the general course and conduct of your life. If there were others you suppress them. You were first informed that your life is approaching its end, and that but a few years remain to you.[1] Secondly, you were bidden to renounce the study of

[1] Boccaccio at this time was about fifty-one years old.

poetry. Hence your consternation and sorrow, which I shared at first as I read, but which a little reflection served to efface, as it will in your case too, if you will but lend me your ears, or listen to the utterances of your own better reason. You will see that, instead of being a source of grief, the message ought to give you joy.

I do not belittle the authority of prophecy. What comes to us from Christ must indeed be true. Truth itself cannot lie. But I venture to question whether Christ was the author of this particular prophecy, whether it may not be, as often happens, a fabrication attributed to him in order to insure its acceptance. And what of the fact that similar phenomena have been recorded among those who are quite ignorant of his name? If we may believe the pagan poets and philosophers, it was not at all unusual for dying men to utter prophecies; both the Greek literature and our own mention many such instances. Note, for example, that Homer makes Hector foretell the death of Achilles; Virgil tells us how Orodes warns Mezentius of his doom; Cicero mentions the same prophetic power in the cases of Theramenes, who foresaw the death of Critias, and of Calanus, who foretold that of Alexander. Another example, more like that which troubles you, is mentioned by Posidonius, the most celebrated philosopher of his time. He tells us of a certain inhabitant of Rhodes who, on his death-bed, indicated six of his contemporaries who were shortly to follow him to the grave; and, what is more, he actually foretold the order in which those people would die. This is not

the place to consider either the authenticity or the explanation of such cases. Suppose, though, that we do grant their trustworthiness, as well as that of other similar prophecies which are reported to us, including the one by which you have recently been terrified; what is there, after all, which need fill you with such apprehension? We are usually indifferent to those things with which we are familiar, and are excited and disturbed only by the unexpected. Did you not know well enough, without hearing it from this man, that you had but a short span of life before you? . . .[1]

I might commend to you, in your perplexity, the reflections of Virgil,[2] as not only helpful but as the only advice to be followed at this juncture, were it not that I wished to spare the ears of one to whom poetry is absolutely forbidden. This prohibition filled me with much more astonishment than the first part of the dying man's message. If it had been addressed to an old man who was, so to speak, just learning his letters, I might have put up with it, but I cannot understand why such advice should be given to an educated person in the full possession of his faculties, . . . one who realises what can be derived from such studies for the fuller understanding of natural things, for the advancement of morals and of eloquence, and for the defence

[1] Here follows a series of reflections upon the brevity of life and the inevitability of death, supported by excerpts from Ambrose and Cicero. Petrarch often reverts to this subject in his letters.

[2] To wit, the lines, "Stat sua cuique dies . . . sed famam extendere factis, Hoc virtutis opus."

of our religion. (We have seen with what signal success those whom I have just enumerated [1] used their learning.) I am speaking now only of the man of ripe years, who knows what is due to Jupiter the adulterer, Mercury the pander, Mars the man-slayer, Hercules the brigand, and—to cite the less guilty—to the leech Æsculapius, and his father, Apollo the cither-player, to the smith Vulcan, the spinner Minerva; and, on the other hand, to Mary the virgin-mother, and to her son, our Redeemer, very God and very man. If, indeed, we must avoid the poets and other writers who did not know of Christ, and consequently do not mention his name, how much more dangerous must it be to read the books of heretics, who only speak of Christ to attack him. Nevertheless the defenders of the true faith do read them, and with the greatest attention.

Believe me, many things are attributed to gravity and wisdom which are really due to incapacity and sloth. Men often despise what they despair of obtaining. It is in the very nature of ignorance to scorn what it cannot understand, and to desire to keep others from attaining what it cannot reach. Hence the false judgments upon matters of which we know nothing, by which we evince our envy quite as clearly as our stupidity.

Neither exhortations to virtue nor the argument of approaching death should divert us from literature; for in a good mind it excites the love of virtue, and dissipates, or at least diminishes, the fear of death. To desert our studies shows want of self-

[1] Viz., Lactantius, Augustine, and Jerome.

confidence rather than wisdom, for letters do not hinder but aid the properly constituted mind which possesses them; they facilitate our life, they do not retard it. Just as many kinds of food which lie heavy on an enfeebled and nauseated stomach furnish excellent nourishment for one who is well but famishing, so in our studies many things which are deadly to the weak mind may prove most salutary to an acute and healthy intellect, especially if in our use of both food and learning we exercise proper discretion. If it were otherwise, surely the zeal of certain persons who persevered to the end could not have roused such admiration. Cato, I never forget, acquainted himself with Latin literature as he was growing old, and Greek when he had really become an old man. Varro, who reached his hundredth year still reading and writing, parted from life sooner than from his love of study. Livius Drusus, although weakened by age and afflicted with blindness, did not give up his interpretation of the civil law, which he carried on to the great advantage of the state. . . .

Besides these and innumerable others like them, have not all those of our own religion whom we should wish most to imitate devoted their whole lives to literature, and grown old and died in the same pursuit? Some, indeed, were overtaken by death while still at work reading or writing. To none of them, so far as I know, did it prove a disadvantage to be noted for secular learning, except to Jerome, whom I mentioned above; while to many, and Jerome himself not least, it was a source

of glory. I do not forget that Benedict was praised by Gregory for deserting the studies which he had begun, to devote himself to a solitary and ascetic mode of life. Benedict, however, had renounced, not the poets especially, but literature altogether. Moreover, I very much doubt if his admirer would have been himself admired had he proceeded to adopt the same plan. It is one thing to have learned, another to be in the process of learning. It is only the hope of acquisition which the boy renounces,—quite a different thing from the learning itself, which an older person gives up; the former but turns away from an obstacle, while the latter sacrifices an ornament. The trials and uncertainties of acquisition are alone surrendered in one case; in the other the man sacrifices the sure and sweet fruit of long, laborious years, and turns his back upon the precious treasure of learning which he has gathered together with great effort.

While I know that many have become famous for piety without learning, at the same time I know of no one who has been prevented by literature from following the path of holiness. The apostle Paul was, to be sure, accused of having his head turned by study, but the world has long ago passed its verdict upon this accusation. If I may be allowed to speak for myself, it seems to me that, although the path to virtue by the way of ignorance may be plain, it fosters sloth. The goal of all good people is the same, but the ways of reaching it are many and various. Some advance slowly, others with more spirit; some obscurely, others again conspicuously.

One takes a lower, another a higher path. Although all alike are on the road to happiness, certainly the more elevated path is the more glorious. Hence ignorance, however devout, is by no means to be put on a plane with the enlightened devoutness of one familiar with literature. Nor can you pick me out from the whole array of unlettered saints, an example so holy that I cannot match it with a still holier one from the other group.

But I will trouble you no longer with these matters, as I have already been led by the nature of the subject to discuss them often. I will add only this: if you persist in your resolution to give up those studies which I turned my back upon so long ago, as well as literature in general, and, by scattering your books, to rid yourself of the very means of study,—if this is your firm intention, I am glad indeed that you have decided to give me the preference before everyone else in this sale. As you say, I am most covetous of books. I could hardly venture to deny that without being refuted by my works. Although I might seem in a sense to be purchasing what is already my own, I should not like to see the books of such a distinguished man scattered here and there, or falling, as will often happen, into profane hands. In this way, just as we have been of one mind, although separated in the flesh, I trust that our instruments of study may, if God will grant my prayer, be deposited all together in some sacred spot where they may remain a perpetual memorial to us both.[1] I came to this decision upon the day

[1] In regard to Petrarch's library see above, pp. 28 *sqq*.

on which he died who I hoped might succeed me in my studies.[1] I cannot, however, fix the prices of the books, as you most kindly would have me do. I do not know their titles and number, or their value. You can arrange this by letter, and on the understanding that if it should ever occur to you to spend with me the little time which remains to us, as I have always wished, and you at one time seemed to promise, you will find the books you send with those that I have recently gathered together here, all of them equally yours, so that you will seem to have lost nothing, but rather gained, by the transaction.

Lastly, you assert that you owe money to many, to me among others. I deny that it is true in my case. I am surprised at so unfounded and even absurd a scruple of conscience on your part. I might apply Terence's saying, that you seem "to be looking for a joint in a reed." You owe me nothing but love, and not even that, since you long ago paid me in full,—unless it be that you always are owing, because you are always receiving. Still, one who pays back so promptly cannot properly be said ever to owe.

As to the complaint of poverty, which I have frequently heard from you before, I will not attempt to furnish any consolation or to cite any illustrious examples of indigence. You know them already. I will only say plainly what I have always said: I con-

[1] It is not known to whom Petrarch refers here; de Nolhac suggests his son Giovanni, who died a year before this was written. *Cf. op. cit.*, p. 68, note 1.

gratulate you for preferring liberty of mind and tranquil poverty to the opulence which I might have procured for you, even though tardily.[1] But I cannot praise you for scorning the oft-repeated invitation of a friend. I am not in a position to endow you. If I were, I should not confine myself to pen or words, but should address you with the thing itself. But I am amply supplied with all that two would need, if, with a single heart, they dwelt beneath a single roof. You insult me if you scorn my offers, still more so, if you are suspicious of their sincerity.

PADUA, May 28 (1362).

The following letter is one of Petrarch's most unreserved confessions of confidence in Christian asceticism.

On a Religious Life.

To his Brother Gherardo, a Carthusian Monk.[2]

Your double gift,—the boxwood box, which you yourself in your leisure moments had polished so carefully on the lathe, and the very edifying letter, built up and strengthened by a vast number of quotations from the Fathers, and testifying a truly religious spirit,—reached me yesterday evening. I was delighted to receive them both, but as I read the

[1] The pope had asked Petrarch to suggest someone for a papal secretaryship. He had offered the place to Boccaccio, who however refused it.

[2] *Fam.*, x., 5.

letter I was, I must confess, affected by strangely conflicting emotions, now warmed by generous impulses, now paralysed by chilling fear. Your admirable example aroused in me the longing to lead a better life, and supplied the incentive; it loosed the hold which the present exercised over me, enabling me to see more clearly where I really stood. You showed me the road which I must follow, and the distance which still separates me, miserable sinner that I am, from our other home, the New Jerusalem, for which we must always sigh, unless this dark and noisome dungeon of exile has destroyed all recollection of our true selves.

Well, I congratulate both of us,—you, that you have such a soul, myself, that I have such a brother. Yet, in spite of this, one thing fills me with pain and regret,—that while we had the same parents we should not have been born under the same star. We are sprung from the same womb; but how unlike, how unequal! This serves to show us that our natures are the gift, not of our earthly parents, but of our Eternal Father. We were begotten in carnal depravity by our father; to our mother we owe this vile body; but from God we receive our soul, our life, our intellect, our desire for good, our free will. All that is holy, religious, devout, or excellent in human nature comes directly from him.

So your letter at once comforted and distressed me. I rejoiced in you and blushed for myself. I can only say in reply to it that what you write is all very good and helpful, though it would have been quite as true even if you had not supported it so abun-

dantly by high authorities. Take, for example, the opinion, which you call in St. Augustine to defend, that our endeavours, as well as our desires, are often at variance with one another.—I should like, however, if you will permit me, to express my own views upon this matter before coming to Augustine's. By so doing I shall gratify myself without, perhaps, annoying you.

The aims of mankind as a whole, and even those of the individual, are conflicting. This must be admitted; I know others and myself all too well to deny it. I have looked at the race as a whole, and have examined individuals in detail. What can, in truth, be said that will apply to all; or who can possibly enumerate the infinite diversities which distinguish mortals from one another, so that men do not seem to belong to the same species or even to the same genus? . . .[1] This, I confess, surprises me, but it is much more astonishing that the wishes of one and the same man should so ill agree. Who of us, indeed, desires the same thing when he is old that he craved as a youth? Or, what is still stranger, who wants in the winter what he wished in the summer? Nay, who of us would have to-day what we longed for yesterday, or this evening what we sought only this morning? As for that, we can see the vacillation from hour to hour, from minute to minute. Yes, there are more desires in man than minutes to realise them. This is a constant source of wonder to me, and I marvel that everyone should

[1] Four or five pages of somewhat trite reflections are here omitted, as they cast no real light upon the writer's attitude toward religion.

not find it so. But I am losing myself, and must return to you and your Augustine.

That the same individual may at the same moment be in disagreement with himself in regard to the same object—a truth which you call St. Augustine to witness, although you do not express yourself in exactly his words—is a source of the most profound astonishment to me. How common, nevertheless, is this species of madness,—to desire to continue our journey but without reaching the end, to wish to go and stay at the same time, to live and yet never die! Yet it is written in the Psalms, "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" Still, we harbour these contradictory desires. In our blindness and incredible perversity we yearn for life, and execrate its outcome, death. These wishes are, however, thoroughly at variance with each other, and mutually exclusive. Not only does death necessarily follow life, but, as Cicero says, —in whose opinion on this point I have, for some reason, almost more confidence than in that of Catholic writers,—"What we call our life is in reality death." So it falls out that we both hate and love death above all things, and are fitly described in the words of the comic poet,—*Volo nolo, nolo volo.*

But let us leave aside for the time being these philosophical reflections, which, although perhaps inopportune, are none the less true, and deal with this matter as a common man might. Let us accept this life as it is generally conceived and so fondly cherished; let us suppose it to begin to-day—what

does it really promise us? Surely anyone can readily infer the answer who reviews the experience of the years already passed, and uses the same measure for the future, although in his imagination he may extend his hopes and cares to a full century of life. What, may I ask, is the prospect for those who are already advanced in years? What is past is certainly dead and gone, and for the future we can only rely upon the assurances of a fleeting and precarious existence. Even if its promises should be fulfilled, the stubborn fact remains that the same number of years seems in old age, for some reason which I cannot explain, shorter than in the first part of our life. Who, then, can doubt the full truth of your assertions, that we are constantly occupied in a fervid quest for happiness and prosperous days, when neither happiness nor prosperous days are to be found? Nor can we hope for rest or safety, or life itself, or anything except a hard and weary journey toward the eternal home for which we look; or, if we neglect our salvation, an equally pleasureless way to eternal death. Should we not, then, seek our true welfare while we still have time, in the only place where the good and perfect can be found?

Of the other matter which you treat in so finished a manner in your letter I will say nothing, both because your treatment is quite exhaustive, and because the language of religious discussion could have little weight in the mouth of a sinful and miserable man, such as I. I content myself with admiring in silence the constancy of your mind and the vigour

of your style. It is plain that you have had a very different preceptor in the monastery from what you found in the world. It is not surprising that he who could teach you to will and to act could also teach you to speak, for speech follows the mind and actions closely. You have, in a brief space, altered greatly as to both the inner and the outer man. This would surprise me more had I not learned the power of the Most High to change the heart of man. For he can with equal ease affect the disposition of the race or of a single individual; he can move the earth or change the whole face of nature. You have sought out for me a noble array of passages from the Fathers, and ordered them so artfully that I am led to admire your arrangement almost as much as the sentiments themselves. Skilful composition frequently brings home to us what we should otherwise miss, as we learn when we study the art of poetry. You will forgive me one suggestion. You are extremely modest, perhaps too modest, and wanting in proper self-confidence. You would do well to trust, for a time at least, more to your own powers; nor be afraid that the same spirit which made the Fathers wise will not aid you. For it is written, "It is not ye who speak, but the spirit of my Father which speaks in you." You may give utterance to truths of your own, perhaps very many, which will benefit not only yourself but others as well.

Coming finally to myself, who have been, by reason of the storms which rage about me, a serious source of brotherly solicitude and apprehension to

you, I can only say that you are justified in cherishing a lively hope, if not the complete assurance, of my safety. I have not forgotten the counsel you gave when you left me. I cannot maintain that I have actually reached the haven, but, like sailors caught in a storm out at sea, I have found my way to the leeward of an island, so to speak, where I am protected from the wind and waves. Here I lie and wait until I may make a safer harbour. On what do I base my hope ? you will ask. With Christ's help, I have sought to fulfil the three duties which you recommended to me, and have, with all my might, tried to carry them out more and more fully each day. I do not tell this for my own glory, for I am still afflicted by many ills and misgivings, and have much to regret in the past, much to trouble me in the present, and much to fear in the future, but I send you word of my progress in order that you may rejoice in the first fruits of your efforts, and that the greater the hopes you have of me, the more frequently you may pray for my salvation.

In the three following respects I have complied with your injunctions. In the first place, I have, by means of solitary confession, laid open the secret uncleanness of my transgressions, which would otherwise have fatally putrified, through neglect and long silence. I have learned to do this frequently, and have accustomed myself to submit the secret wounds of my soul to the healing balm of Heaven. Next, I have learned to send up songs of praise to Christ, not only by day but in the night. And following your admonitions I have put away habits of sloth,

so that even in these short summer nights the dawn never finds me asleep or silent, however wearied I am by the vigils of the evening before. I have taken the words of the Psalmist to heart, "Seven times a day do I praise thee"; and never since I began this custom have I allowed anything to distract me from my daily devotions. I observe, likewise, the admonition, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee." When the hour arrives I feel a mysterious stimulus which will not allow me to sleep, however oppressed I may be with weariness.

In the third place, I have learned to fear more than death itself that association with women which I once thought I could not live without. And, although I am still subject to severe and frequent temptations, I have but to recollect what woman really is, in order to dispel all temptation and return to my normal peace and liberty. In such straits I believe myself aided by your loving prayers, and I trust and beg that you will continue your good offices, in the name of him who had mercy on you, and led you from the darkness of your errors into the brightness of his day. In all this you are most happy, and show a most consistent contempt for false and fleeting joys. May God uphold you. Do not forget me in your prayers.

IN SOLITUDE. June 11 (1352).

In spite, however, of the conventional and even ardent respect which Petrarch paid to the monkishness of his age, he was, after all, too

genuine and independent a thinker not to turn against some of its implications. For instance, he would never consent to give up his secular literary pursuits, or admit that they were unholy. He was always ready to defend the study of the classics, and, as we have seen, he vigorously dissuaded his more impressionable friend Boccaccio from yielding to spiritual intimidation. He frankly admits, moreover, that he could never overcome the longing for personal glory, which he hoped to secure by his Latin writings. The proud boasts of Horace and Ovid, who claimed immortality for their works, suggested to his eager, restless spirit something very different from the self-annihilation of the cloister. Whether he really believed such aspirations to be utterly incompatible with Christian humility, is difficult to decide. Late in life he did not hesitate to celebrate the "Triumph of Glory" in Italian verse, but in his earlier days he was less confident of the righteousness of merely earthly aspirations.

Most of us would nowadays doubtless agree that few things in this world are on the whole less vain than fame. At the least, the pursuit of it seems to us in no way ignoble; it is, as Petrarch says, a "splendid preoccupation."

The reader will have noted from time to time references in the letters to Petrarch's longing for undying renown. It is one of the chief themes of the *Secret*, to which we shall turn in a moment.

The letter which follows deals with this matter; it is the earliest which we have from his hand, and was written, probably, in 1326, while he was still a student at Bologna. His views at the age of twenty-two were not essentially different from those which he held at seventy.

On the Impossibility of Acquiring Fame during one's Lifetime.

To Tommaso di Messina.[1]

No wise man will regard as peculiar to himself a source of dissatisfaction which is common to all. Each of us has quite enough to complain of at home; a great deal too much, in fact. Do you think that no one ever had your experience before? You are mistaken,—it is the common fate of all. Scarcely anyone ever did or wrote anything which was regarded with admiration while he still lived. Death first gives rise to praise,—and for a very simple reason; jealousy lives and dies with the body. "But," you reply, "the writings of so many are lauded to the skies, that, if it be permissible to boast, . . ."

[1] *Fam.*, i., 1.

Here you stop, and, as is the habit of those who are irritated, you leave your auditor in suspense by dropping your sentence half finished. But I easily guess your half-expressed thought, and know what you would say. Many productions are received with enthusiasm which, compared with yours, deserve neither praise nor readers, and yet yours fail to receive any attention. You will certainly recognise in my words your own indignant reasoning, which would be quite justifiable if, instead of applying it exclusively to yourself, you extended it to all those who have been, are, or shall be, seized by this passionate and diseased craving to write.

Let us look for a moment at those whose writings have become famous. Where are the writers themselves? They have turned to dust and ashes these many years. And you long for praise? Then you, too, must die. The favour of humanity begins with the author's decease; the end of life is the beginning of glory. If it begins earlier, it is abnormal and untimely. Moreover, so long as any of your contemporaries still live, although you may begin to get possession of what you desire, you may not have its full enjoyment. Only when the ashes of a whole generation have been consigned to the funeral urn do men begin to pass an unbiassed judgment, free from personal jealousy. Let the present age harbour any opinion it will of us. If it be just, let us receive it with equanimity; if unjust, we must appeal to unprejudiced judges,—to posterity, seeing that a fair-minded verdict can be obtained nowhere else.

Personal intercourse is a most delicate matter, disturbed by the merest trifles. Actual contact with a person is peculiarly disastrous to his glory. Intercourse and familiarity are sure to beget contempt.[1]

When we turn to the scholars—and we are all familiar with that half-starved, overworked breed—we find that, in spite of all their toil, they, too, are totally wanting in critical ability. They read a deal, but never subject what they read to criticism; and it certainly would never occur to them to examine the merits of a man's work if they thought they knew the man himself. They all follow one law; let them but cast their eyes on the author, his works invariably weary and disgust them. But you will say, "This may happen to the less highly gifted; a really great genius will, however, overcome all obstacles." But if you will bring back Pythagoras I will see that his detractors are not wanting. Suppose Plato to return to Greece, Homer and Aristotle to rise from the dead, Varro and Livy to appear again in Italy, and Cicero to flourish once more,—they would find not only lukewarm admirers but jealous and virulent calumniators, such as each found in his own generation. Who among all Latin writers

[1] Dante's reasoning in the *Convito* (cap. iii. *sq.*) offers an interesting analogy to that of Petrarch. "I have," he says, "gone through almost all the land in which this language [Italian] lives,—a pilgrim, almost a mendicant; . . . and I have appeared despicable in the eyes of many who perhaps, through some report, had imagined me in other guise; in the sight of whom not only did my person become contemptible, but my works, both those that were completed and those that remained to be done, appeared less worthy." Dante adds a philosophical explanation of this.

is more truly great than Virgil? Let him appear among us, and he would be a poet no longer, but a low-lived plagiarist, or a mere translator. He, however, dared to rely upon his own genius and the patronage of a judge like Augustus, and so disdained from the bottom of his heart the carpings of envious contemporaries.

You also, I know, are confident of your powers, but where will you find a judge like Augustus, who, as is well known, assiduously encouraged every kind of talent in his time? Our kings can pass judgment on the flavour of a dish, or the flight of a hawk; but on human qualities they can offer no opinion, and, should they try, their insolent pride would blind them or keep their eyes from the truth. Lest they should seem to respect anything in their own age, they profess an admiration for the ancients, about whom, however, they scorn to learn anything. So with them the praise of the dead entails an affront to the living. It is among such critics that we must live and die, and, what is hardest, hold our peace.

Where, I asked, are you to find a judge like Augustus? Italy rejoices in one, indeed. Yes, there is one such on earth, Robert, the Sicilian king. Happy Naples! which enjoys the unequalled good fortune of possessing the single ornament of our age. Happy and most enviable Naples, the august home of literature! If thou once seemedst sweet to Virgil, how much greater thy charm since the most equitable of censors of talent and learning lives within thy borders! All who have faith in their powers flee to him. Nor should they delay, for

delay is dangerous. He is well advanced in age; the world has long deserved to lose him, while he has well earned the title to happier realms. I fear that I myself may be storing up unavailing regrets by my delay. It is always shameful to put off a good thing, and deliberation may be so prolonged as to become blameworthy. The opportunity should be improved, and that which could not be accomplished earlier should be done now, without further delay. As for myself, I have resolved to hasten with all possible speed, and to dedicate all my powers to him (as Cicero says, in one of his letters, of Cæsar). It may come to pass that, by ardent application, I may yet reach the goal. As a belated traveller, although he has overslept, may yet, with speed, reach his destination earlier than if he had spent the night on the road, so I, late as I have been in offering my homage to this man, may still make up for lost time by increased diligence. As for you, you must adopt your own expedients, since it is not simply the narrow strait, but war, which forms the obstacle between you and this monarch. Your country, which has no more loyal citizen than yourself, now lies under the dominion of a hostile ruler,[1] or tyrant, as I might say, did I not fear to offend your ears. But such a mighty question as this is to be decided, not by our pens, but by the swords of those interested. . . .

Reverting now to our original discussion, to-day

[1] Sicily, it will be remembered, had revolted from the rule of Charles of Anjou, at the time of the Sicilian Vespers, 1282, and still remained under rulers belonging to a branch of the house of Aragon.

[we see about us, among others,] the lawyers, in whom the passion for self-glorification is universal, and those fellows who spend their whole time in disputations and dialectic subtleties, forever wrangling over some trivial question:—hear my verdict upon the whole pack of them. Their fame will surely die with them; a single grave will suffice for their name and their bones. When death shall have forced their own paralysed tongues to silence, those of others will be equally silent in regard to all that concerns them. . . . But what is it, after all, that we are so anxiously striving for? The fame we reach after is but a breath, a mist, a shadow, a nothing. A sharp and penetrating mind will therefore easily learn to scorn it. But if, perchance,—since it is a pest which commonly pursues the generous soul,—thou canst not radically extirpate this longing, thou mayest at least check its growth with the sickle of reason. Accept the laws of time and circumstances. Finally, to sum up my advice in a word, seek virtue while thou livest, and thou shalt find fame in thy grave. Adieu.

BOLOGNA, April 18th.

VII

PETRARCH'S CONFESSIONS

Est autem aliqua propositi mei ratio. Eam enim quam hic sperare licet gloriam, hic quoque manenti quaerendam esse persuadeo ipse mihi. Illa maiore in coelo fruendum erit, quo qui pervenerit hanc terrenam ne cogitare quidem velit. Itaque istum esse ordinem ut mortalium rerum inter mortales prima sit cura: transitoriis aeterna succedant: quod ex his ad illa sit ordinatissimus progressus. *Secretum*, in Ed. of 1496, *Colloquium tertii diei*, k (the pages are unnumbered).

THE art of self-revelation is no easy one to acquire and when acquired it must be practiced with circumspection. It is however possible to talk of oneself with good grace and to get others to listen. Indeed a man's opinion of himself—if only we can come at it—is rarely indifferent to us. We have an almost morbid anxiety to know what others think of themselves, if only they can and will tell us. We all like to take our turn behind the grating of the confessional. Artistic confessing is essentially a very modern accomplishment. While the nineteenth century furnishes us many charming examples, the instances of satisfactory self-exposure before Rousseau's unblushing success are really rare. Probably Augustine is the first name that will occur to us. Job's case and that of the far more ancient Egyptian who has left his weary reflection on life are hardly in point. The Greek and Roman writers have left us plenty of comments on the inner life, but no one tells us his own individual

intimate story, unless it be Marcus Aurelius. In the Middle Ages Peter Damianus, Abelard and Héloïse, and others shed abundant tears over their evil thoughts, without however giving us any complete pictures of their varied emotions and ambitions. Nor does Dante succeed in doing this; although he may be dimly seen through a mist of allegory. Petrarch's *Secret* is the earliest unmistakable example of cool, fair, honest and comprehensive self-analysis that we possess.

Few have suffered more keenly than Petrarch from a troublesome form of self-consciousness. He was, as we have seen, ever concerned with his conduct, ever fearful lest his high pursuits were vain, if not unequivocally wicked. He was half-ashamed of his noblest sentiments; even his popularity disturbed him.

. . . . . onde sovente
Di me medesmo meco mi vergogno.

His love for Laura long tormented his conscience: he even doubted whether his craving for literary fame were not a fatal propensity which might endanger his eternal welfare.

With a view of getting clearly before himself all the questions which were constantly harassing him he prepared an imaginary dialogue,

suggesting somewhat Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, in order to do full justice to the claims of each and all of his conflicting desires and emotions.

One day, he tells us, as he was meditating upon the confused mysteries of life, there appeared before him a wondrous Lady, whom, after his eyes had recovered from the dazzling light about her, he recognised as Truth. With her came a venerable person of profoundly religious mien, in whom Petrarch immediately discovered his favorite ghostly comforter, Saint Augustine. The Lady, having perceived the straits in which the poet was, had taken pity on him in his moral illness and had brought with her her cherished devotee, to whom she now commends him.

Having all retired to a secluded spot, they join in a consultation, which was prolonged during three days. Much was said of the evils of the age and of mortal perversity in general, but the discussion of his own sins made the deepest impression upon Petrarch. "And lest this friendly conference should fade from my mind," he says, "I resolved to write it down and have filled this little book with it. Not that I would wish it to be reckoned with my other works, nor do I write it for fame's sake (I

am now dealing with higher matters), but solely in order that I may revive at will the delight which I then derived from our converse. Therefore, little book, thou wilt avoid the intercourse of men and wilt contentedly abide with me, not forgetful of thy name: for thou art 'My Secret' and so thou shalt be called."

The Confessions are, as their author tells us, not very voluminous—less than 30,000 words. They consist of the three dialogues that took place upon the three successive days; the conversation is spirited and natural throughout and infinitely superior to the pseudo-dialogues of the better known *Remedies for both Good and Evil Fortune* by the same author. We have no means of determining exactly when the Confessions were written. As Petrarch was accustomed to revise his work over and over again, it is probable that several years elapsed after the plan was once conceived before the little book received the finishing touches. There is, however, sufficient internal and external evidence to indicate that the work was written between the years 1342 and 1353; that is, at a time when its author's literary powers may be assumed to have been at their height. He must have been about thirty-eight

years old when he began it, and had perhaps reached his fiftieth birthday before he laid it aside in the form that it has come down to us. In the printed editions the Confessions are called *De Contemptu Mundi*, a title that is at once misleading and unsuopprted by Petrarch's own authority. A much more pertinent heading is found in most of the manuscripts, namely, *De secreto Conflictu curarum suarum*,—the inward struggle between the monastic and secular ideals of life.[1]

It would be a grave misapprehension to suppose that the dialogue does not reflect a very real contradiction in the soul of the writer. No careful reader can fail to see in it the bitterness of a spirit at odds with itself. Indeed its whole significance lies in the sturdy and heartfelt defence of the intrinsic virtue of the more noble temporal ambitions, especially those of a man of letters, against the deadening suggestions of monasticism. The dialogues were written after Petrarch had outgrown his youthful unquestioning exuberance and before he had reached the philosophic calm of his later years. Even if he gives way, often reluctantly

[1] The following analysis of the Confessions was published in the *Romanic Review*, vol. i., Nos. 3–4, 1910. Since its appearance a complete English version of the little work has appeared, *Petrarch's Secret*, translated by William H. Draper, London, 1911.

indeed and doubtfully, before Augustine's reasoning, his habitual conduct and his attitude of mind in old age prove that he was not vanquished. In the long run, the modern, or, if you will, the classical, spirit was destined to prevail, as we shall later see.

In this three-days' conference the first two days are devoted to the nature and cause of man's earthly misery, and its cure. "You remember," Augustine inquires, "that you are mortal?" Francesco replies that he not only remembers it but that the thought never fails to fill him with a certain horror. "If this be so it is well," his Confessor rejoins, "it will much lighten my duties; for it is certainly true that nothing is so efficacious against the seductions of this life and so potent to strengthen the soul amid the tempests of the world as the recollection of our own misery and meditation upon death; but this thought should produce no light and fleeting impression; it must sink into our very bones and marrow. I very much fear that in this respect, as in many other ways that I have observed, you deceive yourself."

Francesco replies that he does not think the remedy for human misery so simple as that suggested by Augustine, but admits that he

does not altogether understand his reasoning. "I thought you had a better-developed mind," Augustine sharply rejoins; "it had not occurred to me that we should have to go back to first principles. Had you committed to memory the truths and salutary injunctions of the philosophers which you have often encountered in my works, and (if you will permit me to say it) had you laboured for yourself rather than for others and made the result of so much reading the rule of your life instead of an idle boast to gain the empty plaudits of the common herd, you would not be guilty of such crude and silly utterances."

No one is unhappy or can become so except voluntarily, Augustine continues. Cicero and the other philosophers amply prove that only that which is opposed to virtue can make us truly unhappy. "I remember," Francesco replies, "that these are the doctrines of the Stoics, but they are opposed to popular belief, and are better in theory than in practice (*veritati propinquiora quam usui*)." All vice begins voluntarily, he admits, yet he has seen many a man, himself included, who would gladly throw off the yoke of sin but who tries to do so in vain. In spite of the Stoics' cold comfort they remain the miserable victims of

evil their lives long. He does not deceive himself as to the serious nature of his condition; on the contrary, he sheds many a bitter tear but finds no relief. Augustine replies that he himself experienced the same trials at the time of his own conversion, his account of which is doubtless familiar to Petrarch. The fundamental difficulty lies in our indifference to spiritual liberty. We do not, as Petrarch readily agrees, really desire to be free from our sins.

"No one can be dominated absolutely by this desire unless he puts an end to all other desires; for you well know how many and various are the objects of our wishes in life, all of which must come to be reckoned of no value if one would rise to the true yearning for the highest happiness. . . . Who is there indeed who could succeed in extinguishing all his desires,—it would be a long task even to enumerate them, to say nothing of conquering them,—in order that he might some day hope to guide his soul by the reins of reason, and dare to say 'I have nothing in common with the body; all that once seemed pleasing has become vile in my sight: I aspire to higher things.'" Such an one is rare enough, Francesco concedes. "But what in your opinion,"

he asks, "must we do in order that we may cast off our earthly shackles and rise to heaven?"

The problem has now been enunciated. Let us see what is the solution which the "First Modern" accepts in the heyday of his life and success. He admits the inefficacy of Cicero's admonitions. Of the Bible he says little or nothing. Virgil's words, not David's or Paul's, come to his mind in the depths of his perplexity. The dialogue continues as follows:

Augustine. We have now reached the point toward which I have been guiding you. It is that form of meditation (on Death) that we mentioned at the beginning, coupled with an ever-present consciousness of our mortality, which produces the desired result.

Francesco. Unless I am again misled, no one has oftener been preoccupied by these thoughts than I.

Augustine. Alas, here is a new task for me.

Francesco. What? I am not lying?

Augustine. I prefer to express myself more politely.

Francesco. But that is your meaning.

Augustine. Assuredly.

Francesco. Then I do not think of death?

Augustine. Very rarely, and then so indolently that the thought cannot penetrate into the depths of your perversity.

Francesco. I had thought otherwise.

Augustine. You should look not to what you thought but to what you should have thought.

The Confessor explains that he does not refer to the general recognition of the possibility of death as a distant contingency or even of its imminence as illustrated by the death of those who fall about us. We can hope for no advantage except we vividly reproduce its physical and spiritual horrors. He then enters upon a concise description of the physical accompaniments of dissolution in its most distressing forms, with the painful minuteness which we might expect in a treatise upon epilepsy. He dwells upon the advantage of exposing the bodies of the dead to the view of those earnestly struggling toward spiritual enfranchisement, and upon the salutary and permanent impressions that come from witnessing the preparation of the corpse for burial. In this way the trite idea of our mortality may become vivid and life-giving.

Francesco readily assents to Augustine's reasoning, for he recognises in it much that he habitually turns over in his own mind. He asks, however, for some sure sign by which he can determine whether his ascetic meditations are doing their work, or whether he is deceiv-

ing himself by false appearances instead of walking in the path of virtue. Augustine explains accordingly that so long as we do not become literally pale and rigid with the very thought of death our labours are vain.

The soul must leave the members and stand before the judgment seat of eternity about to render an exact account of the words and deeds of its whole past life. It places no hope in bodily beauty or the applause of the world, in eloquence, riches, or power; the judge cannot be corrupted or deceived. Death may not be placated, nor is it the end of torments but only a step toward worse things. "Let the soul sink to Hell itself, *inter mille suppliciorum, mille tortorum genera, et stridor et gemitus Averni et sulphurei amnes et tenebrae et ultrices furiae.*" If you can bring all these before your eyes at once, not as mere imaginings, but as necessary, inevitable, nay as already upon you, and yet not yield to despair but abide strong in the faith that God can reach out his hand to snatch you from these horrors, you show yourself curable. Anxious to rise and tenacious of purpose you will go forth with confidence and may know that you have not meditated in vain.

This spiritual exercise appears to have been an habitual one with Petrarch, but, as is not unnatural, he was disappointed in its results.

When I dispose my body like that of a dying person, and bring vividly before me the hour of death

and all the attendant terrors that the mind can conjure up, so that I seem to be in the very agony of dissolution, I sometimes behold Tartarus and all the terrors you depict and am so afflicted by the vision that I arise terrified and trembling, and to the horror of those about me I break forth in the words, "Alas how shall I escape these sufferings? What is to be the end of my woes? Jesus, help me! . . . .

I rave like a madman and talk to myself, as my distracted and terrified intellect is driven this way and that. I address my friends, and my own tears force tears from them. Yet I return to my old ways when my burst of weeping is once past. What holds me back in spite of these experiences? What hidden impediment has rendered these meditations up to the present only a source of pain and terror? I am still exactly what I was before, and what those are to whom nothing of this kind perhaps ever happened in their life. I am indeed more miserable than they in one respect, for whatever may be the outcome, they at least rejoice in the pleasure of the present while I, uncertain of the end, experience no joy that is not embittered by the reflections of which I have spoken.

Against such a sentiment Augustine naturally protests, but somewhat weakly; and Petrarch firmly maintains that the worldly man is the better off.

At the close of this first dialogue Petrarch

gives a brief analysis of his character which displays his profound self-knowledge. Augustine declares that Francesco's spiritual welfare is threatened by his want of concentration and by the multitude and variety of conflicting purposes which oppress his weak mind. He has not the strength or time to accomplish half of what he lightly undertakes. "So it comes to pass," Augustine continues, "that, as many things brought into a narrow space are sure to interfere with one another, so your mind is too choked up for anything useful to take root or grow. You have no settled plan, but are turned hither and thither in an amazing whirl; your energies are never concentrated: you are never wholly yourself."

The dialogue on the second day opens with a critical examination by Augustine of the main sources of Francesco's pride and self-complacency. This is, at bottom, as we shall see, a confession of Petrarch's own misgivings that his literary ambitions are vain and hopeless. Augustine declares that Francesco is distracted by the phantoms and idle anxieties of ambition, which are especially likely to drag down the more noble spirits to their ruin; and that it is high time to endeavour to save him from

such a fate. It is easy to prove how trivial are the advantages that have aroused his pride.

You trust to your intellectual powers and your reading of many books; you glory in the beauty of your language and take delight in the comeliness of your mortal frame. But do you not perceive in how many respects your powers have disappointed you, in how many ways your skill does not equal that of the obscurest of mankind, not to speak of weak and lowly animals whose works no effort on your part could possibly imitate? Exult then if you can in your abilities! And your reading, what does it profit you? From the mass that you have read how much sticks in your mind, how much takes root and brings forth fruit in its season? Examine your mind carefully and you will find that all you know, if compared with your ignorance, would bear to it the same relation as that borne to the ocean by a tiny brook, shrunk by the summer heats.

Man may know much of heaven and earth, of the courses of the stars, the virtues of herbs and stones and the secrets of nature, and still be ignorant of himself. He may be familiar with all the deeds of illustrious men in the past, but not heed his own conduct.

What shall I say of your eloquence [Augustine continues], except what you yourself confess? Has not your reliance on it often proved vain? Your

hearers may perhaps have applauded what you said, but what advantage is that, if you yourself condemn your words? Although the applause of the auditors seems the natural fruit of eloquence, not to be despised, yet if the inward applause of the orator himself be wanting, how little gratification can the cheers of the crowd afford!

Then follows a very interesting digression upon the poverty of language. Words are often wanting worthily to express the commonest of our daily experiences. How many things about us have no names at all! How many that have names can never be adequately described by human speech! "How often have I heard you bitterly complain and seen you silent and dejected, because thoughts that were perfectly clear and easily understood in the mind, could not be fully expressed by tongue or pen." This leads to a discussion of the asserted superiority of Greek over Latin in respect to the richness of its vocabulary, and of the opinions of Cicero and Seneca. Augustine concludes with his own conviction that both languages are poor.

Petrarch was far too gifted a scholar not to recognise the limitations of language. In the little guide-book which he once prepared for a friend who was planning to visit the Holy Land,

he speaks again of his inability to describe the beauties of nature. He felt the same discouragements that the conscientious student feels to-day, although his field of knowledge seems to us hopefully limited and well-defined.

Francesco refutes Augustine's accusations with some warmth:

> You say that I rely upon my abilities, although I certainly discover no indication of genius in myself, unless it be the fact that I place no faith in possessing it. My reading of books, moreover, is not a source of pride, since it has brought me little knowledge and new causes of anxiety. I strive, you say, to gain fame by my style, and yet, as you yourself mentioned, nothing so vexes me as that my words are inadequate to reproduce my conceptions. You know, unless you are merely aiming to try me, that I have always been conscious of my insignificance; and if I have sometimes thought otherwise, it was due to a consideration of the ignorance of others. It has happened to me, as I am accustomed often to repeat, that according to the well-known saying of Cicero, we shine rather by the obscurity of others than by our own brightness.

Augustine sees in this the most noxious kind of pride, and says that he would prefer that Francesco should frankly overrate himself rather than that he should assume a haughty humility through despising everyone else.

Augustine charges Petrarch with worldliness and avarice, which will be sure to grow stronger as he gets older. He once delighted in the country and its simplicity, but the life in the city has made him sordid and grasping. Francesco admits that he dreads the thought of poverty during his declining years. His demands are modest and legitimate; his daily bread and a book or two are all he asks. Like Horace, his only object is *nec turpem senectam degere, nec cythera carentem.* Augustine acquits Francesco at least of any tendency to over-indulgence in food and drink, and approves of his friends, who, he has observed, are both sober and dignified in their deportment.

Purity is then spoken of. Francesco admits that he has sometimes wished himself a senseless stone. He has made a desperate struggle to free himself from the bonds of sensuality, but he has not been wholly successful.

Augustine now startles Francesco by the abrupt statement that the worst is still to come. The most serious spiritual disease has not yet been mentioned.

Augustine. You suffer from a certain dismal malady of the mind that the moderns call *acedia* and which the ancients termed *aegritudo.*

Francesco. The very name of the disease fills me with horror.

Augustine. No wonder, for you have long been grievously vexed by it.

Francesco. I admit it; and it is because there is after all a certain admixture of sweetness, however false, in almost all the other things that torment me. When I am in this sad state everything is bitter, wretched, terrible, the road to desperation opens before me and I behold all those things which may drive an unhappy soul to destruction. The attacks of my other passions, if frequent, are short and fleeting, but this plague sometimes holds me with such persistence that it binds and tortures me for days and nights together. Light and life are blotted out and I seem plunged in Tartarean gloom and the bitterness of death. But nevertheless, as the culmination of my miseries, I feast upon the very pangs and throes of my anguish with a certain confined pleasure, so that I am reluctant to be torn from them.

Augustine. You seem to know your disease well; We will now look to the cause. Say on; what is it that so saddens you—some adversity in your worldly affairs, bodily pain, or some stroke of ill fortune?

Francesco. Not any one of these. If I were engaged in single combat I should certainly hold my own. But as it is I am overwhelmed by an army.

Affliction after affliction has attacked him in rapid succession. He has finally been forced to take refuge in the stronghold of reason.

There his ills lay siege to him and receiving constant reënforcements they set up their battering-rams and mine the walls. The turrets tremble and the scaling ladders are in place, and he sees the glittering swords and the threatening visages of his enemies appearing above the wall. "Who would not be filled with terror and bewail his fate, even if the enemy withdrew for the moment? Liberty is gone, the saddest of losses to the stout-hearted." Augustine finds this figurative language a little vague and confused but thinks that he understands Petrarch's case. He accuses him of mourning over misfortunes long past. "No," Francesco exclaims; "on the contrary, none of my wounds are old enough to be forgotten; those that afflict me are all recent, and lest perchance any one of them might be healed by time, Fortune takes care to strike me often in the same spot, so that the gaping wound may never cicatrise. Add to these troubles a hate and contempt for the human estate itself and I can not be otherwise than sad and dejected when oppressed by all these woes. I by no means exaggerate this *acedia*, or *aegritudo*, or whatever you choose to call it; my description exactly corresponds to the facts."

We must not allow ourselves to be misled by

Petrarch's use of the word *acedia*, which is really quite inapplicable to his trouble. The term is a common one among mediæval writers and appears in the catalogue of the seven mortal sins. It is sometimes inadequately rendered as "sloth," but it appears to have been loosely applied to all varieties of depression and inertia, whether physical or moral. In the case of monks it might take the form of a natural reaction which followed the first enthusiasm of leaving the world and beginning a religious life. Even the most earnest, Saint Jerome says, were sometimes plunged into melancholy by the dampness of their cells, the loneliness and excessive fasts that made up their lives. For such troubles, he dryly adds, the fomentations of Hippocrates would be more in place than our admonitions. A twelfth century theologian says, "*Acedia* fears to undertake anything great, and soon wearies of what it once begins. Everything seems a burden and an obstacle to it, and nothing is light or easy." Dante found those guilty of *acedia* fixed in the slime of the sixth circle of hell, and they said to him: "Sullen were we in the sweet air that by the sun is gladdened, bearing within ourselves the sluggish fume."

But this surely was not Petrarch's trouble.

No one was ever more prone to conceive new and noble enterprises, or more patient and conscientious in their execution. He was as far removed from such intellectual apathy as from the vulgar physical laziness which the monkish chroniclers sometimes comprehend under the name *acedia*, and which took the form of a notable reluctance to leave a warm bed for the chilly morning service. We may then assume that Petrarch uses the word in the very general sense of bodily depression, discouragement, and intellectual misgiving, without any reference to its usage among theologians and monks.[1]

The Confessor pronounces the case to be one demanding radical treatment. "What," he asks, "seems to you the worst of all these troubles?"

[1] The classical term *aegritudo* is scarcely more to the point than the mediæval expression. It is often used by Cicero in one of his *Tusculan Disputations*, but it is not the bitterness of spirit with which Petrarch suffered. Seneca's little work upon *Peace of Mind* may, as Voigt has suggested, have influenced this portion of the Confessions. But while Petrarch resembled Seneca in more than one respect and was drawn to his writings by an obvious spiritual affinity, his personal experiences were far too genuine and spontaneous to require the example of another to bring them to light. No one can compare the Roman's treatise with the Confessions without quickly absolving Petrarch from any attempt consciously or unconsciously to imitate Seneca. Our conception of the nature of the poet's mental disquiet must be sought in the dialogue itself.

Francesco. What I happen first to see, hear or think of.

Augustine. There is then almost nothing which gives you any satisfaction?

Francesco. Little or nothing.

Augustine. Would that you enjoyed at least the more salutary things of life. But what displeases you most? Tell me, I beg of you.

Francesco. I 've already answered you.

Augustine. This *acedia* then, as I call it, affects everything; everything connected with yourself disgusts you?

Francesco. And not less everything that has to do with others.

Fortune has not been simply niggardly in her treatment of him but bitterly unjust, disdainful, and cruel. He rejects any comfort which might come from considering the destitution that he sees among the still less fortunate. He claims that he is not unreasonable in his demands.

I take it hard that no one with whom I am acquainted among my contemporaries has been more modest in his claims than I, and yet no one has found it more difficult to reach his end. I never have longed for the highest place. I call to witness Him who knows my thoughts as He knows all things else, that I have never supposed that the peace and tranquillity of mind, which I believe are to be esteemed above all

other things, are to be found in acme of fortune Hence, as I have always abhorred a life filled with care and anxiety, a middle station has, in my sober judgment, ever seemed the best, . . . and yet, to my sorrow, I have never been able to gratify so moderate a desire. I am always in doubt as to the future, always in suspense. I find no pleasure in the favours of fortune, for, as you see, up to the present I live dependent on others, which is the worst of all. God grant that it may come about, even in the extreme of old age, that one who has all his life been tossed about on a stormy sea, shall at least die in port.

Petrarch has often been criticised for his subserviency to the princes of his time, upon whom he seems to have depended for support, so far as his revenue from several minor preferments in the Church failed to satisfy his needs. He loved independence, however, and the concessions that were necessary in order to maintain the favour of his patrons evidently galled him, as is shown by the passage just cited. Augustine comforts him with the assurance that it is given to very few indeed to be absolutely independent. Philosophical resignation can alone bring freedom and true wealth.

In answer to Augustine's question whether he suffered from bodily weakness, Francesco admits that his body, if a bit troublesome at times, is very tractable as compared with many

of those he sees about him. He refuses with propriety to enumerate his physical disabilities.

The life in a city was a constant source of irritation to the sensitive man of letters. "Who could adequately express my weariness of life," he exclaims, "and the daily loathing for this sad distracted world and for the low, degraded dregs of humanity, given over to all manner of uncleanness, that fill it! Who can find words to describe the sickening disgust aroused by the stinking alleys full of howling curs and filthy hogs, the din of the passing wheels which shake the very walls, the crooked ways blocked by carts, the confused mass of passers-by, the revolting crowd of beggars and cut-purses!" "Add to these distractions," Petrarch characteristically continues, "the conflicting aims, the bewildering variety of occupations, the confused clamour of voices, and the bitter rivalry of interests among the people; these combine to wear out a spirit accustomed to happier surroundings, destroy the peace of generous minds, and prevent attention to higher things."

His Confessor reminds him, however, that he has chosen of his own free will to live in town and may easily retire to the country if he wishes. On the other hand he may so accustom himself in time to the sounds of the

city that, far from distracting him, they may become as grateful to his ears as the roar of a waterfall. "If," Augustine continues, "you could but succeed in quieting the inward tumult of your mind, the uproar about you might indeed strike your senses, but could not affect the soul."

He farther recommends the careful perusal of Seneca, and especially of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations:*

Francesco. You should be aware that I have already read these carefully.

Augustine. And have they not profited you?

Francesco. Nay, when one reads a great deal, no sooner is a book laid down than its effect ceases.

Augustine. The common fate of readers, which produces those accursed monstrosities, able to read indeed, but forming a disgraceful, unstable band who dispute much in the schools on the art of living but put few of their principles to the test.

Petrarch was urged to make notes, as was indeed his invariable habit, at those passages in his reading which were likely to prove most useful for moral support and stimulus. These notes served as hooks by which the memory might cling to thoughts that would otherwise escape it. With such reënforcement he might

face with complacency all his ills, even the heaviness of heart that he describes.

Petrarch, it may be added, believed that he derived a double benefit from the classical authors, upon whom he depended for moral strength and solace. There were, of course, the numerous precepts to be found in the writings of Cicero, Horace, and Seneca, which might be taken quite literally. In Virgil, however, as is well known, he espied a deeper, allegorical, meaning below the surface. In the famous description of a storm in the first book of the *Æneid* he sees in Æolus, for example, reason controlling the unruly passions that are ready to carry away heaven and earth if their master relaxes his vigilance. Petrarch was, however, a scholar of too great insight not to suspect that Virgil perhaps had no such moral end in view. Augustine, in a passage that ought to be considered in any discussion of Petrarch's view of allegory, says: "I commend these secrets of poetical narration in which I see you abound, whether Virgil himself thought of them when he wrote, or whether, far removed from such considerations, he simply intended in these verses to describe a storm at sea and nothing more."

Important as are the first two dialogues for the light they shed upon the poet's inner life, his motives and doubts, the interest of the Confessions culminates perhaps in the conversation of the third and last day, during which Petrarch's love for Laura and his longing for fame are considered.

Of the woman who is the theme of nearly all of Petrarch's Italian lyrics we know almost nothing. There is the memorable record of her death on the fly-leaf of her lover's favourite copy of Virgil, and two or three more or less vague references to his passion for her in his voluminous prose correspondence. In a Latin metrical epistle he has something to say of the matter to his friend Giacomo Colonna. The Confessions, however, afford us the clearest picture of the lover turned philosopher, and no one can read them without understanding the Italian sonnets better and grasping more clearly a fundamental contrast between the mediæval and modern theory of life.[1]

One of the most serious of Petrarch's earlier moral conflicts was that waged in his bosom between the monk and the lover. He was forced, if he would find rest, to reconcile, or decide between, the mediæval ecclesiastical

[1] See above, p. 87 *sqq.*

and the modern secular conception of man's love for woman. By the ecclesiastical or monkish view of love is meant, of course, the belief in its essential depravity and inherent sinfulness, quite regardless of the particular relations between the lover and his beloved. Petrarch, although quite averse to theology, held some of the great Church Fathers, especially Augustine, in high esteem, and their doctrines of the close association of sexual love and original sin were familiar to him. He was, moreover, a priest himself and a devout adherent of the traditional faith of his Church. On the other hand he knew his classics well, and loved and revered the authors of antiquity to whom love was no sin. He revolted by nature against the theory that the deep and permanent fascination which woman exercises over man is devilish in its origin, as was taught by the mediæval preachers and illustrated by many a coarse and licentious tale; and in the dialogue, to which we now turn, he hotly defends the higher and purer conception of his affection. His veneration for Augustine, who consistently maintains the debasing nature of earthly love is, however, too profound to permit him in the end to repudiate altogether the teachings of asceticism.

To return to the dialogue. Augustine would finally strike off two golden manacles, love and fame, whose specious glitter so dazzles the poor captive that he reckons them his most precious possessions. None of his aspirations have ever seemed to him more noble than the very ones Augustine now reproaches him for. "What have I done to you," Francesco indignantly asks, "that you should seek to deprive me of my most glorious preoccupations and condemn to perpetual night the brightest portions of my soul?" It seems to him that his Confessor is indiscriminately condemning two quite different things when he declares love to be the maddest of all forms of madness. If love is sometimes the lowest form of passion it may also be the noblest activity of the soul. He can imagine nothing happier than the attraction which a truly noble woman has exercised over him. He has never loved aught but the beautiful, and if he is mistaken in his conception of love he prefers to remain so. To Augustine's ready objection that one may love even the beautiful shamefully, he replies, with ill-timed levity, that he has sinned neither in noun nor adverb and that Augustine must prove him to be ill before he tries his remedies, since physic has often undone a well man.

Augustine expresses his frank astonishment that a person of such parts should have allowed himself to be deceived by false blandishments during no less than sixteen years past. His lady's eyes will, however, one day be closed by death, then the lover will recall with shame his infatuation for the poor perishable body. Sickness and successive trials have already told upon her, and her lovely person has lost much of its pristine vigour. He does not question her virtues. He will grant that she is a queen, a saint, a goddess,—Phoebus's own sister, if her lover will have it so. Her supreme qualities, however, furnish no excuse for Francesco's errors. Obviously the most virtuous may be the object of an unworthy passion.

One thing at least I will say [Francesco exclaims], whatever I have achieved is due to her. I should never have been what I am, if there be any distinction or glory in that, had not the scattered seeds of virtue, which nature implanted in this breast, been cultivated by her through my noble attachment. She restrained my youthful spirit from every shameful act; . . . she led me to look toward higher things. Is it wonderful [he continues], that her noble fame has provoked in me a longing for a like reputation and has lightened the strenuous effort with which I pursued my object? How could I have done better in my youthful days than to please her who alone

pleased me? For I cast aside a thousand seductions of pleasure in order to take up the serious tasks of life before my time. You know this well and yet you command me to forget, or love in only a half-hearted fashion, her who separated me from the vulgar company and guided me in all my chosen paths, stimulating my sluggish nature and rousing my dull intellect.[1]

To all this Augustine has two objections. In the first place, although Francesco's love may have saved him from minor errors, his anxiety for fame, which he attributes to it, has put him on the shortest road to spiritual death. In the second place, it is vain for him to maintain that he loves chiefly the soul; that he would have loved her spirit in even "a foul and knotty body (*in squalido et nodoso eorpore*)," for he has but to interrogate the past to see that he has steadily degenerated since first he met his lady. She, indeed, has done all she could to keep him right. In spite of his prayers and allurements she maintained her womanly integrity, and although their ages and circumstances would have shaken the stoutest resolutions, she remained firm and unapproachable. In his effort to absolve and exalt her Petrarch of course condemns himself,

[1] The same idea is expressed in the canzone beginning, Perchè la vita.

and so justifies Augustine's contention. Love, in spite of our illusions about it, is but a passion for temporal things, and nothing so surely separates man from God. Let Francesco consider its pestiferous effects in his own case; how, suddenly, his life was dissolved in tears and sighs, how he spent sleepless nights with the name of the beloved ever on his lips; how he despised his usual pursuits, hated life, fled his fellow-beings and longed for sad death. Wasted and pale and restless, his eyes ever moist, his mind confused, his voice weak and hoarse,—no more miserable and distracted creature could be imagined.

Not contented with her living face [Augustine continues], you must forsooth seek out a famous painter,[1] in order that you might carry about her image, fearful lest your tears might otherwise cease. And to cap your follies you showed yourself as completely captivated with the splendour of her name as with that of her person, and cherished with incredible levity everything that sounded like it. And this is the reason you so ardently desired the Imperial or poet's laurel [*laurea*], for that was her name, and from the moment you first met her hardly a song has escaped you without mention of the laurel. Finally, since you could not hope for the Imperial you set your heart upon the poet's crown, of which the distinction of your learning held out a promise. And

[1] *I. e.*, Simone Memmi. *Cf.* sonnet Per mirar.

you loved and longed for that with as little modesty as you had longed for Lady Laura herself.

Francesco would object that he began his poetical studies before he knew Laura, and had coveted the laurel chaplet from boyhood, and that without the inspiration of her name he would scarcely have overcome the many obstacles which stood between him and his coronation at Rome. This, his Confessor declares, is but one of the excuses which passion always finds; it is unworthy of a serious answer. The miserable results of love have been sufficiently illustrated, of which the chief is that it separates us from God and things divine, for how can a soul bent under the burden of such evils drag itself to the one pure fountain of true good?

"I am worsted," Francesco exclaims,—*Victus sum fateor*—"all these ills which you have depicted are, I perceive, but excerpts from my own book of experience. What am I to do?"

It is needless for Augustine to say that the subject of the remedies of love has been treated by famous philosophers and poets; there are whole books on the question. It would, too, be an insult to one who professes himself a

master of ancient literature to indicate to him where these works may be found.

Cicero's suggestion, and Ovid's, that an old passion may be driven out by a new one, *tanquam clavum clavo*, is not without its dangers, and, moreover, Francesco asserts that he can never love another than Laura. Then let him seek distraction in travel. Francesco replies that he has tried this resource repeatedly; while he has assigned various motives for his endless wanderings and his frequent sojourns in the country, liberty was always his real object. He had sought it far and wide but in vain, for he always carried his trouble with him. Augustine admits that a previous change of heart is after all indispensable. He would nevertheless better leave Avignon at least and betake himself to his Italy, whose skies and hills exercise over him an unrivalled fascination. He has too long been an exile from his country and himself.

"Have you looked into your mirror lately?" Augustine abruptly asks. "Does not your face change from day to day? Are there not already scattered grey hairs about your temples?" Francesco has noted these, but he sees the same thing when he looks at those of the same age about him. He does not know

why people grow old sooner than they once did. Here Petrarch characteristically mentions a few instances of early grey hairs among the ancients. Augustine regards these examples as worse than irrelevant and as tending to lead one to disregard the signs of approaching death. He says impatiently that if he had referred to baldness, doubtless Francesco would have instanced Julius Cæsar. Of course he would have mentioned Cæsar, Petrarch replies; and if he had but one eye, he would take pleasure in recalling Hannibal and Philip of Macedon. He uses these examples, like his household furniture, to afford him simple daily comfort. "Had you upbraided me for being afraid of thunder, since I could not deny that I was, I should have replied that Augustus Cæsar suffered from the same trouble. Indeed, herein lies by no means the least important reason for my cherishing the laurel, which they say is never struck by lightning."

Consider, Augustine urges in conclusion, not only the uncertainty of life and the imminence of death.

Think shame to yourself that you are pointed at and have become a subject of gossip with the common herd. Think how ill your morals harmonise with your profession. Think how your mistress has

injured you in soul, body, and estate. Consider how much you have needlessly suffered for her sake. Think how often you have been deluded, despised, and neglected; what blandishments, tears, and lamentations you have poured out, and of the haughty, ungrateful arrogance with which she received them. If there was the least indication of humanity in her conduct, how trifling it was, more fleeting than the summer breeze. Consider how you have added to her fame and what she has taken from your life; how anxious you have been for her good name, how careless of your welfare she has always shown herself. Think how through her you have been alienated from the love of God. . . . Consider the useful and honourable tasks which you have so long neglected, the many incomplete works which lie before you and which demand your whole energy, not merely the odd moments which your passion leaves free. . . . If the honour of true glory does not attract you nor ignominy deter you, let the shame of others induce you to make a change in your life. You should guard your good name, if for no other reason, at least to save your friends the disgrace of telling lies for your sake.

Lastly, what is it that you long for so ardently? Consider it intently, practically. Few there be who when once they have imbibed the sweet poison of desire, really manfully, I will not say consistently, dwell upon the foulness of woman's person. Their minds consequently easily relapse, under the pressure of nature, into the old habits. Forget the past. Importune heaven with your prayers and permit no

day or night to pass without tearful supplication, for perchance Omnipotence may take compassion upon you and bring your trial to an end.[1]

Augustine now turns to Francesco's longing for fame, which, with his passion for Laura, is the most inveterate and uncontrollable of his moral disorders. This yearning beyond measure for glory among men and an undying name may block his way to true immortality. He has no more grievous fault, although he may have uglier ones. What is fame? Nothing whatever but the general talk of the multitude about one; it is but a breath and, what is worse, the breath of the crowd. "I know whom I am addressing," Augustine continues.

You ordinarily regard nothing as more disgusting than the manners and doings of the common herd. What a want of consistency that you should habitually condemn the conduct of those whose chattering so delights you, nay more, to whom you look for the very consummation of your happiness! To what end are your unceasing labours, your tireless vigils, and excessive attention to study? You may answer that you are learning what will help you to live better. But you long ago learned all that was necessary for both life and death. You would, therefore, better

[1] See above, page 96, for reflections on Petrarch's attitude in this matter.

put the knowledge you have acquired into practice; better try experience rather than laborious ratiocination, which ever opens up new and inaccessible vistas; for there is no end to vain research. Recollect farther that you have given your attention to those things first and foremost which might be expected to gratify the public, and have sought to please them by a means especially distasteful to yourself, namely, by picking out from this poet and that historian such choice bits as might tickle the ears of your listeners.

This accusation naturally irritates the scholar, who has from boyhood scorned anthologies and favourite quotations. He cannot deny, however, that he does sometimes store up for the benefit of his friends and associates choice passages which he meets with. Augustine proceeds:

Not content with this daily occupation, which, although it took a great deal of time, promised you only a reputation among your contemporaries, you conceived of a fame which should reach posterity. Hence you undertook an historical work, covering the period from King Romulus to the Emperor Titus, a tremendous task requiring infinite patience and labour. Then, before this was done, infatuated by this craving for fame you set off on the wings of the poet for Africa. Now you diligently devote yourself to the several cantos of your poem by that name, without, however, giving up the other tasks,

and so your life is divided into two great streams at least, not to speak of innumerable undercurrents. Prodigal of your most precious and irretrievable time, you write of others and forget yourself. Who knows but death may snatch the weary pen from your hand before either work is done?

The last source of apprehension is by no means new to Francesco. He cannot bear to think of another laying hand to his *Africa*, and he confesses that in periods of bitter discouragement he has been on the point of burning the uncompleted manuscript. Augustine naturally recalls to him the melancholy truth that even if, granting the most favourable circumstances, he should succeed in producing a "rare and distinguished work," its fame could not reach far in time or space. Francesco impatiently asks to be spared the old trite reflections of the philosophers. "If you have anything better to urge, pray produce it; all this sounds very fine but I have never found that it helped me. I do not ask to be God and possess eternity and fill heaven and earth. Human glory is enough for me. I do long for that. I am a mortal and I desire only the mortal." To Augustine's horrified deprecation of such doctrine and his condemnation of the rashness of those who recklessly postpone their

supreme interests to their last failing years, Francesco sturdily replies:

> There is a certain justification for my plan of life. It may be only glory that we seek here, but I persuade myself that, so long as we remain here, that is right. Another glory awaits us in heaven and he who reaches there will not wish even to think of earthly fame. So this is the natural order, that among mortals the care of things mortal should come first; to the transitory will then succeed the eternal; from the first to the second is the natural progression.[1]

After this audacious and historically remarkable statement of the Humanists' creed, Francesco humbly asks if Augustine would have him forsake his studies altogether and lead an inglorious existence, or shall he pursue some middle course. His Confessor replies that we do not live inglorious lives although we follow, not fame but virtue; for true fame is but the shadow of virtue. "Throw off the burden of your proposed *Roman History*," Augustine exclaims, "lay aside your *Africa*, which cannot increase the fame of your Scipio or yourself. . . . Turn your thoughts upon Death! Let everything about you recall your pending fate. The heavens, the earth, and the sea all change; what chance that man, the weak-

[1] The original words of this paragraph are given above, p. 412.

est of creatures, should hold his own? Let the setting sun and the waning moon teach their lesson of mortality. Contemplate the graves of your friends. *Hoc iter est in patriam.*"

Petrarch does not deny that this is wholesome advice, but he firmly refuses to give up his literary tasks, which he cannot with equanimity leave half done. He promises sedulously to die unto himself, and will hasten to complete his books in order to devote himself exclusively to religious contemplation. It will be seen that he found little to urge against Augustine's views, but that he nevertheless refused to follow his advice, except so far as he might do so without interfering with what he rightly considered his life's work.

So, without ability to defend completely the modern belief that earnest toil is presumably a far more rational preparation for death than is a paralysing contemplation of its horrors, Petrarch still worked bravely on until the pen dropped from his hand. There is something noble and pathetic in this sturdy, unflagging industry in the face of the discomforting suggestions of monasticism. His life transcended and belied those ideals of his age from which in his less exuberant moments he was unable entirely to free himself.

VIII

FINALE

Nulla calamo agilior est sarcina, nulla jucundior, voluptates aliæ fugiunt et mulcendo lædunt, calamus et in manus sumptus mulcet et depositus delectat, ac prodest non domino suo tantum sed aliis multis sæpe etiam absentibus, nonnunquam et posteris post annorum millorum.—*Sen.*, xvi., 2.

Petrarch's Intention to Work until the Last.

To Boccaccio.[1]

. . .[2] I certainly will not reject the praise you bestow upon me for having stimulated in many instances, not only in Italy but perhaps beyond its confines also, the pursuit of studies such as ours, which have suffered neglect for so many centuries; I am, indeed, almost the oldest of those among us who are engaged in the cultivation of these subjects. But I cannot accept the conclusion you draw from this, namely, that I should give place to younger minds, and, interrupting the plan of work on which I am engaged, give others an opportunity to write something, if they will, and not seem longer to desire to reserve everything for my own pen. How radically do our opinions differ, although, at bottom, our object is the same! I seem to you to have written everything, or at least a great deal, while to myself I appear to have produced almost nothing.

But let us admit that I have written much, and shall continue to write;—what better means have I of exhorting those who are following my example to

[1] *Sen.*, xvi., 2. [2] The first half of the letter is omitted.

continued perseverance? Example is often more potent than words. The aged veteran Camillus, going into battle like a young man, assuredly aroused more enthusiasm in the younger warriors than if, after drawing them up in line of battle and telling them what was to be done, he had left them and withdrawn to his tent. The fear you appear to harbour, that I shall cover the whole field and leave nothing for others to write, recalls the ridiculous apprehensions which Alexander of Macedon is reported to have entertained, lest his father, Philip, by conquering the whole world, should deprive him of any chance of military renown. Foolish boy! He little realised what wars still remained for him to fight, if he lived, even though the Orient were quite subjugated; he had, perhaps, never heard of Papirius Cursor, or the Marsian generals. Seneca has, however, delivered us from this anxiety, in a letter to Lucilius, where he says, "Much still remains to be done; much will always remain, and even a thousand years hence no one of our descendants need be denied the opportunity of adding his something."

You, my friend, by a strange confusion of arguments, try to dissuade me from continuing my chosen work by urging, on the one hand, the hopelessness of bringing my task to completion, and by dwelling, on the other, upon the glory which I have already acquired. Then, after asserting that I have filled the world with my writings, you ask me if I expect to equal the number of volumes written by Origen or Augustine. No one, it seems to

me, can hope to equal Augustine. Who, nowadays, could hope to equal one who, in my judgment, was the greatest in an age fertile in great minds? As for Origen, you know that I am wont to value quality rather than quantity, and I should prefer to have produced a very few irreproachable works rather than numberless volumes such as those of Origen, which are filled with grave and intolerable errors. It is certainly impossible, as you say, for me to equal either of these, although for very different reasons in the two cases. And yet you contradict yourself, for, though your pen invites me to repose, you cite the names of certain active old men, —Socrates, Sophocles, and, among our own people, Cato the Censor,—as if you had some quite different end in view. How many more names you might have recalled, except that one does not consciously argue long against himself! Searching desperately for some excuse for your advice and my weakness, you urge that perhaps their temperaments differed from mine. I readily grant you this, although my constitution has sometimes been pronounced very vigorous by those who claim to be experienced in such matters; still, old age will triumph.

You assert, too, that I have sacrificed a great deal of time in the service of princes. But that you may no longer labour under a delusion in this matter, here is the truth. I have lived nominally with princes, in reality, the princes lived with me. I was present sometimes at their councils, and, very rarely, at their banquets. I should never have submitted to any conditions which would, in any de-

gree, have interfered with my liberty or my studies. When everyone else sought the palace, I hied me to the woods, or spent my time quietly in my room, among my books. To say that I have never lost a day would be false. I have lost many days (please God, not all) through inertia, or sickness, or distress of mind,—evils which no one is so fortunate as to escape entirely. What time I have lost in the service of princes you shall hear, for, like Seneca, I keep an account of my outlays.

First, I was sent to Venice to negotiate a peace between that city and Genoa, which occupied me for an entire winter month.[1] Next I betook myself to the extreme confines of the land of the barbarians,[2] and spent three summer months in arranging for peace in Liguria, with that Roman sovereign who fostered—or I had better say deferred,—the hope of restoring a sadly ruined Empire. Finally, I went to France[3] to carry congratulations to King John on his deliverance from an English prison; here three more winter months were lost. Although during these three journeys I dwelt upon my usual subjects of thought, nevertheless, since I could neither write down my ideas nor impress them on my memory, I call those days lost. It is true that when I reached Italy, on my return from the last expedition, I dictated a voluminous letter on the variableness of fortune to a studious old man, Peter

[1] In 1353.

[2] That is, to Prague in 1356.

[3] In 1360. All three missions were undertaken for the dukes of Milan.

of Poitiers; it arrived too late, however, and found him dead. Here, then, are seven months lost in the service of princes; nor is this a trifling sacrifice, I admit, considering the shortness of life. Would that I need not fear a greater loss, incurred long ago by the vanity and frivolous employments of my youth!

You add, further, that possibly the measure of life was different in olden times from what it is in ours, and that nowadays we may regard men as old who were then looked upon as young. But I can only reply to you as I did recently to a certain lawyer in this university,[1] who, as I learned, was accustomed to make that same assertion in his lectures, in order to depreciate the industry of the ancients, and excuse the sloth of our contemporaries. I sent by one of his students to warn him against repeating the statement, unless he wished to be considered an ignoramus by scholars. For more than two thousand years there has been no change in the length of human life. Aristotle lived sixty-three years. Cicero lived the same length of time; moreover, although he might have been spared longer had it pleased the heartless and drunken Antony, he had some time before his death written a great deal about his unhappy and premature decline, and had composed a treatise on *Old Age*, for the edification of himself and a friend. Ennius lived seventy years, Horace the same time, while Virgil died at fifty-two, a brief life even for our time. Plato, it is true, lived to be eighty-one; but this, it is said, was looked upon as a prodigy, and because he had attained the

[1] Of Padua.

most perfect age the Magi decided to offer him a sacrifice, as if he were superior to the rest of mankind. Yet nowadays we frequently see in our cities those who have reached this age; octogenarians and nonagenarians are often to be met with, and no one is surprised, or offers sacrifices to them. If you recall Varro to me, or Cato, or others who reached their hundredth year, or Gorgias of Leontium who greatly exceeded that age, I have other modern instances to set off against them. But as the names are obscure I will mention only one, Romualdo of Ravenna, a very noted hermit, who recently reached the age of one hundred and twenty years, in spite of the greatest privations, suffered for the love of Christ, and in the performance of numerous vigils and fasts such as you are now doing all in your power to induce me to refrain from. I have said a good deal about this matter in order that you may neither believe nor assert that, with the exception of the patriarchs, who lived at the beginning of the world, and who, I am convinced, developed no literary activity whatever, any of our predecessors enjoyed greater longevity than ourselves. They could boast of greater activity, not of a longer life,—if, indeed, life without industry deserves to be called life at all, and not a slothful and useless delay.

By a few cautious words, however, you avoid the foregoing criticism, for you admit that it may not be a question of age after all, but that it may perhaps be temperament, or possibly climate, or diet, or some other cause, which precludes me from doing what the others were all able to do. I freely concede

this, but I cannot accept the deduction you draw from it, and which you support with laboriously elaborate arguments; for some of your reasons are, in a certain sense, quite opposed to the thesis you would prove. You counsel me to be contented—I quote you literally—with having perhaps equalled Virgil in verse (as you assert) and Cicero in prose. Oh, that you had been induced by the truth, rather than seduced by friendship, in saying this! You add that, in virtue of a senatus consultum following the custom of our ancestors, I have received the most glorious of titles, and the rare honour of the Roman laurel. Your conclusion from all this is that, with the happy results of my studies, in which I rival the greatest, and with my labours honoured by the noblest of prizes, I should leave off importuning God and man, and rest content with my fate and the fulfilment of my fondest wishes. Certainly I could make no objection to this if what your affection for me has led you to believe were true, or were even accepted by the rest of the world; I should gladly acquiesce in the opinions of others, for I should always rather trust their judgment than my own. But your view is not shared by others, and least of all by myself, who am convinced that I have rivalled no one, except, perhaps, the common herd, and rather than be like it I should choose to remain entirely unknown.

As for the laurel wreath, it encircled my brow when I was as immature in years and mind as were its leaves. Had I been of riper age I should not have desired it. The aged love what is practical,

while impetuous youth longs only for what is dazzling. The laurel brought me no increase of learning or literary power, as you may well imagine, while it destroyed my peace by the infinite jealousy it aroused. I was punished for my youthful audacity and love of empty renown; for from that time well-nigh everyone sharpened his tongue and pen against me. It was necessary to be constantly on the alert with banners flying, ready to repel an attack, now on the left, now on the right; for jealousy had made enemies of my friends. I might narrate in this connection many occurrences which would fill you with astonishment. In a word, the laurel made me known only to be tormented; without it, I should have led that best of all lives, as many deem, a life of obscurity and peace.

You put the finishing touch to your argument, it seems to me, when you urge me to do all that I can to prolong my life as a joy to my friends, and first and foremost as a solace to you in your declining years, because, as you say, you desire when you depart hence to leave me still alive. Alas! our friend Simonides[1] also expressed this wish—a wish but too speedily granted: if there were any order in human affairs, it is he who should have survived me. My own desires are, however, directly opposed to those which my friends—you in particular—harbour. I

[1] *I. e.*, Francesco Nelli, Prior of the church of Santi Apostoli at Florence. He died of the plague in 1363. Not only did Petrarch dedicate his *Letters of Old Age* to Nelli, but of the letters preserved, he addresses a greater number (thirty-five) to him than to any other of his correspondents.

should prefer to die while you are all still alive, and leave those behind in whose memory and conversation I should still live, who would aid me by their prayers, and by whom I should continue to be loved and cherished. Except a pure conscience, I believe there is no solace so grateful to the dying as this.

If your counsels spring from the belief that I cling tenaciously to life, you are entirely mistaken. Why should I wish to prolong my existence among customs and manners which make me constantly deplore that I have fallen on such times? To omit more serious disorders, I am afflicted by the perverted and indecent clothing of a most frivolous set of men. I have already too often complained of them, both in speech and writing, but words are powerless to quiet my indignation and distress of mind. These fellows, who call themselves Italians, and were, indeed, born in Italy, do all they can to appear like barbarians. Would that they were barbarians, that my eyes and those of the true Italians might be delivered from so shameful a spectacle! May God Omnipotent confound them, living and dead! Not satisfied with sacrificing by their pusillanimity the virtues of our ancestors, the glory of war, and all the arts of peace, they dishonour in their frenzy the speech and dress of our country, so that we may consider our forefathers happy to have passed away in good time, and may envy even the blind, who are spared the sight of these things.

Finally, you ask me to pardon you for venturing

to advise me and for prescribing a mode of life, namely, that I hereafter abstain from mental exertion and from my customary labours and vigils, and endeavour to restore, by complete rest and sleep, the ravages wrought by advancing years and prolonged study. I will not pardon you, but I thank you, well aware of the affection which makes you a physician for me, although you refuse to be one for yourself. I beg, however, that you will obey me, although I refuse to obey you, and will let me persuade you that, even if I were most tenacious of life, which I am not, I should assuredly only die the sooner if I followed your advice. Continued work and application form my soul's nourishment. So soon as I commenced to rest and relax I should cease to live. I know my own powers. I am not fitted for other kinds of work, but my reading and writing, which you would have me discontinue, are easy tasks, nay, they are a delightful rest, and relieve the burden of heavier anxieties. There is no lighter burden, nor more agreeable, than a pen. Other pleasures fail us, or wound us while they charm; but the pen we take up rejoicing and lay down with satisfaction, for it has the power to advantage not only its lord and master, but many others as well, even though they be far away,—sometimes, indeed, though they be not born for thousands of years to come. I believe that I speak but the strict truth when I claim that as there is none among earthly delights more noble than literature, so there is none so lasting, none gentler, or more faithful; there is none which accompanies its

possessor through the vicissitudes of life at so small a cost of effort or anxiety.[1]

Pardon me then, my brother, pardon me. I am disposed to believe anything that you say, but I cannot accept your opinion in this matter. However you may describe me (and nothing is impossible to the pen of a learned and eloquent writer), I must still endeavour, if I am a nullity, to become something; if already of some account, to become a little more worthy; and if I were really great, which I am not, I should strive, so far as in me lay, to become greater, even the greatest. May I not be allowed to appropriate the magnificent reply of that fierce barbarian who, when urged to spare himself continued exertions, since he already enjoyed sufficient renown, responded, "The greater I am, the greater shall be my efforts"? Words worthy of another than a barbarian! They are graven on my heart, and the letter which follows this[2] will show you how far I am from following your exhortations to idleness. Not satisfied with gigantic enterprises, for which this brief life of ours does not suffice, and would not if doubled in length, I am always on the alert for new and uncalled-for undertakings,—so distasteful to me is sleep and dreary repose. Do you not know that passage from Ecclesiasticus, "When man has finished his researches, he is but at the beginning, and when he rests, then doth he labour"? I seem to

[1] *Cf.* John of Salisbury's Prologue to his *Policraticus* for a much earlier description of the pure joys of literature.

[2] Presumably that which contained the translation of Boccaccio's story of Griselda. See above, pp. 191 *sqq.*

myself to have but begun; whatever you and others may think, this is my verdict. If in the meanwhile the end, which certainly cannot be far off, should come, I would that it might find me still young. But as I cannot, in the nature of things, hope for that, I desire that death find me reading and writing,[1] or, if it please Christ, praying and in tears.

Farewell, and remember me. May you be happy and persevere manfully.

PADUA, April 28 (1373).

[1] A letter from a contemporary, Manzini de la Motta (July 1, 1388), thus describes Petrarch's end: "Francesco Petrarca, the mirror of our century, after completing a vast array of volumes, on reaching his seventy-first year, closed his last day in his library. He was found leaning over a book as if sleeping, so that his death was not at first suspected by his household."—Quoted by Fracassetti, *Let. delle Cose Fam.*, vol. ii., p. 348.

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